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**STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT TO THE CITY:  
ALTERNATIVE SPACES IN POST-SOCIALIST PRAGUE**

**BOJ O PRÁVO NA MĚSTO: ALTERNATIVNÍ PROSTORY  
V POST-SOCIALISTICKÉ PRAZE**

**Ph.D Thesis**

**The Supervisor: Doc. RNDr. Luděk Sýkora, Ph.D.**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this dissertation is my original work conducted under the supervision of Doc. RNDr. Luděk Sýkora, Ph.D. All sources used in the dissertation are indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of Charles University in Prague. The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in Czechia or overseas.

In Prague, July 30, 2012

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Signature

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## **Abstract**

The dissertation focuses on spaces in post-socialist Prague which transcend the hegemony of capitalist social and spatial relations and provide alternative spaces for non-profit culture and grassroots activities used and operated by students, artistic and creative communities, alternative subcultures, and NGOs. The author presents 14 case studies focused on these spaces, whose existence in the city is threatened. Referring to Marxian urban theory and the concept of the *right to the city*, the author critically investigates the democratic character of the social structures which are based on the contemporary socioeconomic model, and interprets the way in which the imperative of capital-accumulation, combined with the legacies of the totalitarian past, constrain the development of open democracy and civil society, and the creation of diverse, vibrant, progressive, and socially inclusive urban environments.

The empirical part of the dissertation outlines the process of creating and operating alternative spaces in Prague during a changing political-economic context, and describes in detail, alternative spaces that existed in Prague in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author discusses these spaces in relation to two different regimes, which existed in Czech society before and after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. She evaluates these spaces in light of the way they differ from Western cities in regards to their relationship to urban development, gentrification and displacement; in connection with Prague's municipal politics and its official strategies; and from the perspective of their users' attitudes towards enforcing their *right to the city*.

Based on a critical scrutiny of the situation of alternative spaces in Prague the author is concluding that through dogmatically embracing neoliberal capitalism Czech society has replaced the former totalitarian regime with a new ideology, which ingeniously eliminates and marginalizes spaces and activities that don't generate economic profit. This fact is presented as a sign that open democracy and a tolerant pluralist society have not yet been created in Czechia. According to the author, the alternative spaces have the potential to contribute to the improvement of the urban and social environment in Prague and in Czechia as a whole.

**Keywords:** Prague, alternative spaces, alternative culture, art, urban society, creative city, post-socialist city, right to the city, Marxist geography, open democracy, neoliberal restructuring, economic crisis, gentrification, urban development, urban politics, civil society

## Abstrakt

Disertační práce se zabývá prostory postsocialistické Prahy, jež se vymykají hegemonii kapitalistických sociálních a prostorových vztahů a poskytují alternativní prostory pro neziskové umění a aktivity zdola využívané a provozované studenty, umělci a kreativními spolky, alternativními subkulturami či nevládními organizacemi. Autorka představuje 14 případových studií zabývajících se těmito prostory, jejichž existence je ve městě ohrožena. S odkazem na marxistickou urbánní teorii a na koncept *right to the city* (*právo na město*) kriticky zkoumá sociální struktury založené na současném socioekonomickém modelu z hlediska jejich demokratičnosti a interpretuje způsob, jímž imperativ akumulace kapitálu kombinovaný s vlivy totalitární minulosti brání rozvoji otevřené demokracie a občanské společnosti, stejně jako vytvoření pestrého, živého, progresivního a sociálně inkluzivního městského prostředí.

Empirická část disertační práce ukazuje hlavní rysy utváření a fungování alternativních prostor během měnícího se politickoekonomického kontextu a detailně popisuje alternativní prostory, které v Praze existovaly na počátku 21. století. Tyto prostory autorka diskutuje ve vztahu ke dvěma odlišným režimům, které v české společnosti existovaly před a po Sametové revoluci z roku 1989. Hodnotí tyto prostory z hlediska jejich odlišnosti od západních měst vzhledem k jejich vztahu k městskému rozvoji, gentrifikaci a vysídlování původních obyvatel; ve vztahu k městské politice v Praze a jejím oficiálním strategiím; a prizmatem postoje uživatelů prostor k prosazování svého *práva na město*.

Na základě kritického přezkoumání situace pražských alternativních prostor autorka dochází k závěru, že dogmatické pojetí neoliberálního kapitalismu nahradilo v české společnosti minulý totalitní režim novou ideologií, jež důmyslně eliminuje a marginalizuje prostory a činnosti, které negenerují ekonomický zisk. Tato skutečnost je představena jako příznak toho, že v Česku dosud nedošlo k vytvoření otevřené demokracie a tolerantní pluralitní městské společnosti. Podle autorky právě alternativní prostory mají potenciál přispět k zlepšení městského i společenského prostředí v Praze i v celém Česku.

**Klíčová slova:** Praha, alternativní prostory, alternativní kultura, umění, městská společnost, kreativní město, post-socialistické město, právo na město, Marxistická geografie, otevřená demokracie, neoliberální restrukturalizace, ekonomická krize, gentrifikace, městský rozvoj, městská politika, občanská společnost

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## **Preface**

This dissertation project has been driven by a number of my passions; my passion for geography, cities and urban life, my admiration of Prague, and my fascination by art, alternative cultures, and grassroots activities, as well as industrial architecture, brownfields' exploration, and the subversion of conventional public space. It has also been driven by my involvement in urban activism and by my political standpoints, fueled by my interest in Marxism and critical theory. Last but not least, it has been inspired by my unceasing belief in the potential of cities to provide amazing venues for various alternative spaces, where humans can use their ideas, talents and creativity, and create the best possible places for human life.

My interest in alternative spaces has its roots in my involvement in Prague's alternative scene, and my critical approach towards cities is rooted in critical and radical approaches in geography, which match with my political standpoints. In November 2009, I was greatly influenced by visiting New York and personally meeting David Harvey, thanks to whom I realized that the best explanatory framework for studying spaces inhabited by various alternative cultures is through a Marxist conceptualization of cities. Since then I have considered myself a Marxist geographer, and I have become more concerned with the restructuring of cities by late neoliberal capitalism, as well as the crisis of democratic decision-making at the municipal level. As an inhabitant of Prague, I have become a fascinated observer of the ways in which the neoliberal agendas of global capitalism shape urban processes and urban forms in the former socialist city, as well as how these new urban forms shape the contemporary urban life of the post-socialist society. My most particular interest is in the way the local alternative culture and non-profit activities are impacted by these changes, in terms of their spatial practices and their position within the city. Many of my questions about this area of interest have been answered thanks to great scholars such as David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, Neil Smith, Paul Chatterton, Peter Marcuse, David Ley, Sharon Zukin, and many others. The great work of my advisor Luděk Sýkora was on the other hand, an indispensable tool for putting international scholarly work into the local context – the context of a post-socialist city.

My critique of contemporary development in Prague led me to other people interested

in similar issues, and together we founded a civil organization called *Praguewatch*, whose main task is developing the city's internet counter-map, thereby increasing public awareness of the problems in municipal politics and urban development in Prague. Since then, I have set forth the mission of increasing citizens' understanding of the environments they live in. Thanks to my dissertation research, this mission has finally intersected with my interests in alternative spaces, alternative cultures and grassroots activities, which are still surrounded by many stereotypes, prejudices, and myths, and which, due to a lack of information, suffer an unequal societal position. Both the professional and the non-professional public is still unaware of the importance of alternative spaces in the development of a liberal democracy, and for the pluralist, inclusive and tolerant society which people hoped to achieve by overthrowing the former totalitarian regime.

Last but not least, it is important to stress that my main goal is to warn against the amassing strength of globalizing neoliberal markets, due to which societies in developed countries are experiencing diminishing prospects for decent lives and thus, a gradual decline of the states' credibility to govern. Alternative spaces, and the cultures and activities they host, can play an important role in leading the struggle against the markets. Instead of opposing them or ignoring them, people should embrace them in order to once again challenge the political and economic status quo and reclaim true democracy and freedom.

## **1. What are alternative spaces and why we should study them?**

My dissertation focuses on alternative spaces in Prague, the capital city of Czechia. My goal is to map and investigate a feature of the city, which so far very little is known about, from the perspective of urban geography in a post-socialist context. By alternative spaces, I refer to locations in Prague that provide an alternative to hegemonic-commercial use and are predominantly utilized for non-profit youth culture and activities, alternative subcultures, artists, non-government, and civil organizations. These users often have needs and desires that cannot be satisfied by the mainstream society, or fulfilled within commonly available spaces subject to the conventional system of economic and social regulation. As a result, they employ various alternative spatial practices, such as inhabiting, using, and creating various spaces that often transgress the rules of spatial organization defined by capitalistic market forces and stand out from the conventional societal norms in terms of their legality, politics, appearance, or other non-dominant aspects.

My dissertation deals with the development of these spaces in the context of fundamental political and economic transformations started by the fall of communism in 1989, as well as the more advanced phase of neoliberal restructuring of the society affected by an ongoing economic crisis, during which the research was conducted. I am providing a narrative of Prague's case in terms of the evolution of alternative spaces and their position within urban space, and in relation to the rest of the society and politics. I also discuss the fact that, in the context of a transforming society, spaces which embed alternative, grassroots, and marginal cultures and activities are crucial for urban environments that are democratic and socially just, and therefore play an important role in the existence and consolidation of a well functioning democracy that includes a well developed civil society and enforceable human rights. These spaces have the potential to create more vibrant, livable and user friendly urban environments, as well as zones of creativity, innovations, and progress. My aim is to point out that despite their obvious societal benefit, alternative spaces in Prague are vulnerable to forces of urban development, as well as political pressure seeking their elimination.

### **What are alternative spaces?**

Around the whole world we can identify an archipelago of alternative spaces which are unconventional and marginal in relation to their surroundings, and which the mainstream society is not very familiar with. They are highly diverse and varied, but their function, purpose, and the ways in which they are obtained or created encompass similarities. Each alternative space reflects the needs and desires it satisfies, and the societal position of its users. The purposes of alternative spaces are countless, since our need for space is essential in everything we do; we need space for living, for working, for ensuring livelihoods, for meeting our peers, or spending our leisure time. Through the continual use of space we meet all our needs, out of which some are more indispensable than others; some needs must be satisfied permanently, while other needs can be met through occasional events. People's need for space can reflect the inextinguishable need for survival, to the ungovernable need for political determination and resistance, to the culturally and psychologically important need for non-dominant life-styles, cultural production and experimentation.

The societal groups that are in underprivileged positions on the economic or cultural margins of the society, have limited access to the spaces necessary to meet some of their basic human needs, or in order to satisfy their peculiar creativity, political self-determination, or their desire to live non-mainstream lifestyles. In a society based on economic competition and private ownership, these groups are often unable to satisfy their needs for space within the frameworks of the contemporary standard regime. As a result they are condemned to establish alternative spaces in peripheral and residual areas, derelict urban neighborhoods, abandoned and dilapidated buildings, or other areas that are not in demand by the mainstream society. In order to reclaim the space, they are typically forced to employ various non-dominant spatial practices. Their spaces then differ depending on the purpose they serve or the tactics and strategies people employ in order to obtain them. They also vary in terms of their legality, or in terms of their relationship with the mainstream society; both of these factors can range from one extreme to another. Some people squat land to secure basic nourishment, break into abandoned buildings in search of shelter or in order to create sites for social gatherings and cultural events. Others negotiate with municipal authorities and convince politicians and bureaucrats about the usefulness of their alternative cultural projects e.g. for purposes of urban renaissance, tourism or the city's cultural economy. Some people establish alternative businesses while still paying market rent, or use nonstandard workspaces in exchange for barter agreements with property owners. Others build informal shanty towns, trailer parks, or

protest camps without ever demanding anyone's permission. Alternative strategies towards reclaiming space are innumerable, as are the types of spaces established in such way.

### **Why we need alternative spaces?**

In democratic societies, the existence of alternative spaces is justified and legitimate. However, in most countries of the world, such spaces are constrained by market forces, by national legal systems, and by a general reluctance on the part of authorities to allow for anything that exists beyond the narrowly delineated standards of the mainstream society. As a result, the current legal frameworks do not make provisions for those groups of people who are disadvantaged, underprivileged, or refuse to conform to the majority. These groups are then bound to secure spaces by employing various spatial practices that disobey and challenge conventions demarked by the structure of the society and its societal norms. Instead of embracing their ability to sustain themselves without relying on the formal networks of social security, the dominant order perceives most of such practices as abnormal or deviant and therefore also as unofficial, inappropriate or illegal, sometimes even punishable. Due to this antagonistic relationship with the mainstream, the societal and spatial position of alternative spaces and their users is unequal, insecure, transient, and constantly shifting in space and time. However, with rising inequalities and diminishing securities in the society, alongside an expanding standardization of urban environments, continually producing an increased need for alternative spaces and alternative spatial practices, it is necessary to increase our understanding of these spaces. In the interest of the inclusive and the democratic character of our society, as well as vibrancy, diversity and progressiveness of our cities, it is of utmost importance to create policies and discourses that embrace new alternative forms emerging in our urban environments, making our cities more viable and sustainable.

### **Researching alternative spaces in Prague, the post-socialist city**

As a research topic, alternative spaces and alternative spatial practices have been predominantly emerging in West European and North American countries. Most of the research has focused on their relation to gentrification, urban renewal and development (Smith 1996; Zukin 1998, 2010; Florida 2002; Ley 1996, 2003), their relation to housing (Kearns 1979; Basu 1988), night-time economy (Chatterton and Hollands 2003), political resistance (Corr 1999; Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006; Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006), as well as to urban policies and the image of the city (Uitermark 2004; Pruijt 2004; Shaw 2006).



So far, nothing has been said about alternative spaces and alternative spatial practices in post-socialist cities, where the inequalities inherent in the capitalist society produce alternative spaces in the context of an environment affected by socialist legacies.

In Czechia, a country transforming from its totalitarian past, where the democratic status quo is still calling for its justification, it is especially important that alternative spaces become an important constituent of urban diversity and vibrancy. Instead of surviving on the societal margins, obliged to succumb to the forces of the market, they should be acknowledged as an important tool for the enhancement and strengthening of civil society, social capital, and social inclusion. By not suppressing or criminalizing non-mainstream spatial practices, culture or activities, the new regime has an opportunity to disavow the practices of the former totalitarian regime, which used to suppress all manifestation of free-thinking and values oppositional to the ones of the ruling party. Since the former regime particularly feared the dissenting supporters of alternative culture – the so called *underground* – which in the end largely contributed to the downfall of the former rule, alternative cultures should be seen as an important tool of democratization. After all, the first Czechoslovak president after democratization, Václav Havel, was an important member of the *underground*.

During a short period after the democratization in the 1990s, the people were full of enthusiastic expectation. It was probably the only time when cities opened up to new cultures, out of which most seemed alternative in light of the former experience. The 1990s were teeming with new ideas, ambitious projects, and expectations that anything was possible. Prague, in particular, epitomized the hayday of alternative cultures; venues for cultural activities, such as clubs, pubs, bars, concert halls, as well as squats and other alternative projects were mushrooming in all kinds of spaces throughout the city. For a few years, the fluid milieu of the transforming country also became a refuge for various alternative cultures from the more traditionally capitalist countries in Western Europe, where tendencies to discipline and commercialize various supposedly subversive subcultures had been more advanced.

However, the free-spirited years did not last long; now seen as just a transitional period between the former totalitarian regime and the new system. After the first democratic decade, the society started to be more affected by neoliberal restructuring. Slowly becoming entrenched in the milieu of the quickly transforming city of Prague since the beginning of the democratization, neoliberal restructuring finally hit the Central European capital with its full

strength at the turn of the millennium, pushing the society to be more market-driven (see Sýkora and Bouzarovski 2012). In the quickly developing post-socialist city of Prague, the struggle for space and commercial property development started to push on the appropriation, rehabilitation, displacement, and destruction of established alternative spaces; some went bankrupt or came under the pressure of newly established bureaucratic requirements, others lost their post-revolutionary ebullience, while some were violently closed down. The ones that survived usually managed to do so at the cost of restrictions and the constant threat of elimination. However, as much as the course of events in Prague squeezed spaces for alternative culture and activities outside of the city, it also created a new niche for their transient existence, albeit increasingly further from the city center and separated from potential users. Large plots of undeveloped and disinvested property in former industrial areas on the edges of the inner city, where the land was expected to rise in value, became subject to redevelopment and speculation. During the economic crisis, and concomitant development stagnation, several vacant spaces within these development areas were legally occupied by a handful of cultural and art projects, whose users had to agree with their displacement in case of the redevelopment, or the demolition of the spaces they were occupying. In the meantime, several attempts were made by other groups to occupy a number of vacant and idle properties in different parts of the city using various illegal and semi-legal methods. These attempts were violently suppressed by the police.

It is therefore important to challenge the current status quo of the society, whose inequalities are producing a growing number of people who are calling for alternative spaces, while at the same time creating terrains where alternative spaces are becoming scarcer and increasingly separated from the people who demand them. This shifting occurrence of alternative spaces is a reflection of the situation in the local real-estate market, local politics, the societal and cultural climate, as well as the overall global economy. The predominantly profit-driven market actors and municipal politicians in Prague neither recognize nor embrace non-mainstream values, and therefore fail to foster them. This ignorance has both downsides as well as benefits; in comparison to the practices of their peers in North America and Western Europe, the local actors have not recognized the cultural and societal potential of alternative spaces, nor their ability to improve the image of old derelict urban areas and disinvested neighborhoods by attracting new investment and middle-class populations. In global megalopolises such as New York, alternative cultures and art have been abused by the developers, investors, urban planners, and politicians for their ability to pioneer new urban

areas and push the city's frontier through gentrification. In certain cities, this practice has been set in cyclical motion and has affected the most vulnerable populations through displacement and economic exclusion. The role of alternative spaces in these cycles is ambiguous as their emergence facilitates development, which subsequently turns against them and pushes for their relocation. Notions of these processes can be also observed in Prague, although they are slightly different, mainly due to the urban landscape shaped by its post-socialist legacies, such as the different socio-spatial stratification, a particular ownership structure affected by previous state ownership, and specific policies pursued by politicians during the course of transformation (Badyina and Golubchikov 2005, Feldman 2000, Reimann 1997, Sýkora 2005).

### **The structure and aims of my dissertation**

In discussing alternative spaces for non-profit culture and grassroots activities in Prague, I hope to reveal an issue that is little known from a geographical perspective. By putting the issue into the broader context of post-socialist transformation and the world economy, as well as framing it in selected theoretical conceptions, I intend to outline the importance of the role that alternative spaces for non-profit culture and activities play in the existence and functioning of democracy.

I am evaluating the current situation in Prague from a critical perspective inspired by Marxist theories, which are particularly efficient in explaining and challenging the downsides of the capitalist hegemony. This critical perspective is introduced in chapter n. 2.1. In chapter n. 2.2 I outline different categories of alternative spaces based on the way they deviate from the societal standards and based on their purpose. I also draft a method of assessing the different types of alternative spaces based on their rate of deviance from the mainstream society. In order to document the unequal position of alternative spaces and their users within the urban space of a post-socialist city, as well as critically reflect on the restructuring of the urban environment affected by rapidly changing political and economic contexts, chapter n. 2.3 is devoted to the theoretical concept of the *right to the city*, which justifies people's right to have equal access to the city and its resources, as well as the right to transform the city and its urban life.

Part 3 of my dissertation is devoted to the methodological use in my research; I use qualitative methods, especially ethnographic fieldwork, and therefore, I also reflect on the

relationship of me as a researcher to the study subject. Part 4 discusses alternative spaces in Prague in the context of fundamental changes to the political and economic system of the country during the past several decades, starting from the main characteristics of alternative spaces and spatial practices under the totalitarian rule, continuing with the emergence of new alternative phenomena during the country's post-socialist transformation, and ending with the introduction of alternative spaces in the consolidating neoliberal state. Parts 5, 6, and 7 constitute the main body of the empirical part – case studies of the contemporary alternative spaces in Prague. In Part 7, the most important section, I will evaluate the alternative spaces and spatial practices that were researched, from four different perspectives. First, I will compare the contemporary situation of alternative spaces in Prague to their situation under the former totalitarian rule. By using this perspective, I want to demonstrate that Czech society cannot be regarded as truly democratic unless non-mainstream phenomena become a full-fledged constituent. Second, I will discuss the way various alternative groups in Prague enforce their *right to the city* by critically evaluating the practices which they employ in order to reclaim their alternative spaces. The third perspective scrutinizes Prague's alternative spaces in relation to urban development and gentrification, and compares the post-socialist practices with those in western capitalist countries. The last evaluation reveals the current approach of the politics towards Prague's alternative spaces; I am discussing them in relation to the official documents outlining Prague's strategic plans and the conception of cultural politics. The crucial aim of this part of evaluation is to outline some improvements to the current policies that would ensure the city's recognition and acknowledgement of the importance of alternative spaces, while securing them a less ephemeral and endangered existence in Prague. Afterwards, the whole dissertation is concluded in Part 8.

## **2. Theoretical frameworks: Critical perspective**

In the theoretical part of my dissertation I will introduce the spaces, which are regarded in this project as alternative and the perspective through which they can be explored and analyzed. In chapter n. 2.1 I will outline the perspective of this dissertation, which is predominantly inspired by Marxist geographers and sociologists and their studies of cities. In chapter n. 2.2, I will define alternative spaces by contrasting them with spaces that are dominant, outlining their main purposes, and introducing their most frequent users, typically people who are disadvantaged in relation to the mainstream society. I will suggest three different types of categorization of alternative spaces based on their relation to the mainstream society and their purpose. Chapter n. 2.3 is devoted to the theoretical discussion surrounding the *right to the city* concept. Chapter n. 2.4 is putting alternative spaces and their users into relation with contemporary urban development, in particular with gentrification and displacement, and chapter n. 2.5 is discussing alternative spaces in relation to municipal politics and their potential for the cities.

### **2.1 The perspective of Marxist geography**

The attempt of this dissertation is to provide a critical perspective of the way alternative spaces in Prague are produced and policed within the frameworks of the contemporary capitalist society. For explaining the relations between alternative spaces and the structure of the society that both produces them and constrains them, Marxist geography seems to be the best analytical tool. After David Harvey published *Social Justice and the City* (1973), his Marxist approach started to inspire geographers in theorizing and demonstrating urban processes in capitalist society; just like Karl Marx questioned and challenged the status quo of the capitalist mode of production, Marxist geographers and social scientists such as Harvey, Lefebvre, or Castells have been questioning the way capitalism produces our cities and affects the city dwellers.

In this dissertation, I will use Marxism as the main theoretical framework in order to question, demonstrate and interpret the interrelations between the dominant capitalistic

society and spaces which constitute an alternative to this dominant order. In the following chapters, I will introduce cities from the Marxist perspective, as well as several scholars famous for using Marxism in theorizing cities, and their followers within the field of the geographic research, who then gave rise to the discipline of radical geography. I will then clarify the way radical geography revolutionized our understanding of the capitalism driven urban processes in contemporary cities. The last chapter explains the main conflicts between Marxist theoretical conception of the city and the reality of socialistic planning.

### **2.1.1 The Marxist perspective of cities**

In contemporary capitalist society, the urban environment of certain cities changes very fast, and often very drastically. The people who are frequently impacted by these changes tend to blindly accept their unequal and passive role in urban processes. The majority of people are predominantly prone to see these market driven processes as “rational”, but at the same time also as driven by forces which are beyond their control and understanding. Marxism has proven to provide an excellent tool for explaining the way these urban processes work, the way they are connected to capitalism, as well as explaining the way capitalism-driven urbanization impacts people. At the same time, I am aware of the historical discreditation of Marx’s teaching in my post-socialist home country; I believe that due to this fact, it is useful to briefly introduce cities from the perspective of the Marxist urban geographers and social scientists.

To introduce a city from a Marxist perspective first and foremost does not mean to introduce a city as an ideal envisioned by socialistic urban planners, nor does it mean to introduce the final outcome of urban development that took place during the decades of communist rule in socialistic countries. As Andy Merrifield remarks in his *Metromarxism* (2002), the general notion of a city associated with Marxism too often tends to be a biased idea of a stereotypical socialist city; “drab Eastern block penal housing estates, gray austerity, grim-faced people going about a life of routinized drudgery”, a notion that is far from the longed-for ideal of a city that most Marxist scholars who specialize in cities advocate (2002, p. 179). In fact, most of the Marxist urban specialists are in love with capitalist cities, and as Merrifield demonstrates, it is this love that has been driving their endeavor to make cities better places for everyone, not just the ruling classes and advantaged social groups.

To look at cities from the Marxist perspective therefore primarily means to tackle the many fundamental contradictions cities are composed of. Cities have a central role in shaping and being shaped by the interplay of economy, politics, society and culture - a huge complexity - which in the contemporary capitalist society is predominantly determined, driven, and constrained by global forces of the capitalist mode of production. The basic contradiction within the capitalist mode of production is the one between capital accumulation and class struggle. Capitalism cannot function without creating social inequalities between people, since they are a fundamental prerequisite for the prosperity of the ruling class. In a capitalist society people succumb their entire lives, both out of their own will and out of necessity, to the dominating need of continual capital production, and are consequently affected by unequal distribution of the capital that the society produces. One of the first intellectuals who used this dialectic in theorizing our cities was Frederick Engels (1968 [1845]), the life-long intellectual fellow of Karl Marx. He pointed to how the economic interests of the bourgeoisie impacted the disastrous conditions of the British working class and the urban environments of industrializing cities. Around the middle of the 20th century, alongside the rise of situationism, radical surrealist art, and a renewed tradition of Marxian thought by the Frankfurt School intellectuals, this Marxist inspired approach, that pays attention to the social injustice, started to appear in geographical scholarship. Scholars and intellectuals such as Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Manuel Castells, and most importantly, David Harvey and his followers, e.g. Neil Smith, asserted the tradition of urban Marxism, which fundamentally changed our understanding of the way the urbanization process interrelates with capitalism to shape the society. Harvey has been especially successful in explaining how capitalism produces an uneven distribution of poverty and wealth within the society, and the way this unevenness is both locally and globally produced, conditioned and further reproduced by spatial organization and its ideological content.

#### **2.1.1.1 Marxist urban theorists**

Prior to the emergence of Marxist geography, the Marxian perspective of theorizing cities was first used by social and political theorists and philosophers, out of which the ones that lived in France became the best known. In France, the years around the beginning of the 1960s until the end of the 1970s were exceptionally fruitful in terms of producing Marxian urban theory. Lefebvre's highly quoted essay, the *Right to the City*, as well as Debord's famous series of short critical theoretical theses, *The Society of Spectacle*, both came out in 1967, and Castell's

contentious and much criticized, *The Urban Question: a Marxist Approach*, followed five years later. All these theoretical works fundamentally influenced consequent production of geographical knowledge, and signaled an important turning point in the convergence of geography and other social sciences that followed.

### **Henri Lefebvre**

Although all inspired by the same theory, the approaches of these first urban theorists towards applying Marxism to the present urban societies and environments were quite different. Lefebvre's lifelong mission was to apply Marxism in a way that was fundamentally different from Stalin's interpretation; Stalin had turned Marxian theories into a dogma abused by totalitarian politics which ultimately led to the discrediting of the whole concept of socialism. As Kipfer (2009, p. xiv) pointed out in quoting Rémi Hess<sup>1</sup>, Lefebvre mainly treated Marxism as "a dynamic movement of theory and practice, not a fixed doctrine and instrument for party strategy". One of the key concepts Lefebvre operated with was "alienation", a notion that Marx had transformed out of the Hegelian "unhappy consciousness"<sup>2</sup>. In his fascination by cities and urban life, Lefebvre used alienation to show the man's separation from the space he had produced for himself to live in – the city. In order to overcome this contradiction one has to become "a total man", a man whose existence is in unity with the society he lives in. This becoming has to be achieved through practice that enables rational expression of the actual content of life. Such practice, alongside the transformation of the present, is the ultimate goal of Lefebvre's dialectical materialism (2009 [1940]). Merrifield notes that Lefebvre's dialectical materialism "constructed a specifically historical and sociological object; it was an analysis and a worldview, an awareness of the problems of the world and a will to transform that world" (2002, p. 77).

Lefebvre was a great promoter of vibrant cities with differentiated spaces enabling people to perform different practices and satisfy a wide range of their needs and true passions that capitalism and consumerism alienates and separates them from. Lefebvre was concerned to see the destruction of traditional ways of life in rural areas as well as the decomposition of urban societies by activities and lifestyles that the bourgeoisie was proclaiming to be in the society's "general interest". And although products of power and human possibilities, as

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<sup>1</sup> Hess, Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle, p. 75-76.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.stjohns-chs.org/general\\_studies/philosophy/Romantic/hegel.html](http://www.stjohns-chs.org/general_studies/philosophy/Romantic/hegel.html)



Lefebvre pointed out, modern cities turned into sites where human possibilities became taken over and controlled to the “point of total control, set up entirely above life and community” (1991 [1947], p. 233). In cities that are controlled in this way, spaces are formed with the aim of enhancing predictable routine behavior, as well as boredom and the gradual growth of indifference. In order to become more human, cities should provide vibrant and romantic environments that enhance spontaneity and allow people to enjoy their everyday lives. In 1960s, Lefebvre started to turn his focus on city centers, assuming they were the cores of the true urban lives he had envisioned. At the same time, he was concerned about the decline of such cities in both European and American cities, which people had fled them in order to live on the periphery or in suburbia, leaving downtown areas to be dominated by commerce and tourism, or succumb to complete degradation. Consequently, Lefebvre’s call for a radical renewal of the urban society, some sort of more human and experimental utopia, transformed into his famous call for the *right to the city* (1996 [1967]), a concept largely inspired the May 1968 protests in Paris, and which will be discussed in more depth in chapter n. 2.3.

### **Guy Debord**

The social movement and events that culminated in the May 1968 protests, represented an era in French history during which Lefebvre’s intellectual work started overlapping with the work of another French Marxist, Guy Debord, an important radical thinker, artist, and a revolutionary. Similarly to Lefebvre, Debord wanted to see a city free from any kind of hegemonic or totalitarian ideology that restrained people’s lives by making them live in non-humanly built cities. To Debord too, spaces in cities planned by the capitalist society were banal, boring and predictable, built in a way that perpetuates production, enhances utilitarian convenience, and kills people’s imagination. Debord became a key figure in two radical groups, the *Lettrist International* and the *Situationist International*, with whom he devoted much of his time to the specific study of urban environments. Debord and his peers were experimenting with different techniques of exploring and subverting conventional urban spaces, a practice that led to the development of the discipline called *psychogeography*:

*“Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery”* (Debord 1955).

The Debordian practice of *psychogeography* was driven by the idea of Unitary Urbanism, a critique of modernist urban planning and functional architectural design that largely prevailed in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, destroying many cities by separating them into fragmented functional units of commodified city spaces, disintegrated and alienated from human agency. The many techniques of subverting the status quo of these spaces included e.g. the practice of *dérive* (also known as drifting)<sup>3</sup>, or the so called *détournement*<sup>4</sup>, and politically engaged art techniques that challenged the bourgeois employment of art for the purposes of capitalist reproduction and propaganda. All of Debord's activities culminated in his theoretical work *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), in which he further developed Marx's theoretical conception of "commodity fetishism". While Marx (1992 [1867]) conceptualized the workers' separation from the products of their work and the role of the commodity as a principal element of social and political relations, Debord was working with the notion of the products' alienation from their users, who can only perceive the commodities' spectacular content, remaining separated not only from the commodities' production but also from the true content beyond the commodities' appearing spectacle; the spectacle - the representation of images – has become more important than the actual material product itself. Debord therefore critiqued the commodification of urban spaces, and his condemnation of urbanization for the purpose of capital accumulation corresponded with that of Henri Lefebvre. Both men were convinced that the city's role in the capitalist mode of production would inevitably lead to its own destruction. Debord's 174<sup>th</sup> thesis expresses this very well:

*"174 The self-destruction of the urban environment is already well under way. The explosion of cities into the countryside, strewing it with what Mumford calls "formless masses of urban debris," is directly governed by the imperatives of consumption. The dictatorship of the automobile — the pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance — has left its mark on the landscape with the dominance of freeways, which tear up the old urban centers and promote an ever-wider dispersal. Within this process various forms of partially reconstituted urban fabric fleetingly crystallize around "distribution factories" — giant shopping centers built in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by acres of parking lots. But these temples of frenetic consumption are subject to the same irresistible centrifugal momentum, which casts them aside as soon as they have engendered enough surrounding development to become overburdened secondary centers in their turn. But the technical organization of consumption*

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<sup>3</sup> „A technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll“ (Debord 1956).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm>

*is only the most visible aspect of the general process of decomposition that has brought the city to the point of consuming itself” (Debord 1967).*

### **Manuel Castells**

In spite of Debord’s and Lefebvre’s lifelong aspirations, the detrimental processes of capitalism driven urbanization have not ceased. In fact, quite the opposite has become the truth; the processes of urbanization have become ever more harming and cities have turned into sites of major contestations. Urban conditions have come to a point extremely fertile for the occurrence of an urban revolution, a term that Lefebvre introduced on the theoretical level, Debord put into practice, and was further developed by other authors. Among the principal scholars that conceptualized the notion of urban struggle was Manuel Castells, a Marxist sociologist of Catalan origin. Castells studied sociology in Paris, where he found a refuge after he had been exiled from Spain due to his involvement in the anti-Franco resistance movement. Throughout his next life, Castells stayed actively involved in politics, interconnecting his theories with practice (Lupač and Sládek 2007). The work of Castells was inspired by the work of his teacher Alain Touraine, a French sociologist specializing in social movements. However, in the beginning of his career, Castells also sided with the teachings of Louis Althusser, a French Marxist philosopher, whose interpretations of Marx were at odds with those who had treated historical materialism like a metaphysical theory, without attempting to apply it in concrete analysis. Althusser instead attempted to transform Marxism into an applicable ideologically-neutral science that could be used in a more relevant and mechanical way. Due to his sympathy for Althusser’s approach, Castells criticized conventional urban sociology, deeming it ideological, and in need of new reconceptualization on the basis of Marxist theory, if real sources of urban problems were to be found. He summed up these early thoughts in *The Urban Question: a Marxist Approach* (1977 [1972]). In this volume, Castells based his critique of capitalist cities on several key arguments: the disappearance of distinction between urban and rural, cities’ transformation into places that facilitate individual and collective consumption for the purpose of labor and class reproduction, the monopoly of state capitalism in shaping urban spaces according to its own interests, and, last but not least, the manifestation of the revolt of the oppressed classes against capitalist conditions in the form of urban social movements. The dialectical approach of Castells towards cities was very different from that of Lefebvre; Lefebvre perceived the cities mainly in terms of the production of space, whereas Castells was more interested in collective consumption and urban social movements (Lupač and Sládek 2007). Merrifield also says that

while Lefebvre believed that capitalism would eventually destroy the city, Castells saw the city as something which capitalism was threatened by, but which also ended up being its main perpetrator. Castells thought that this contradiction would help to “understand the dynamics of the city”, “social change”, and the reason “why capitalism was still around and what the pressure points were in its prevailing ‘monopoly stage’ ” (2002, p. 119-120).

Castells later abandoned this Althusserian approach, and recognized his previous lack of attention towards the subjectivity of particular social and urban problems, as well as towards changing historical contexts. His focus shifted to the contradictions and dynamics between the state power and urban struggle, in which the downsides of the capitalist mode of operation increasingly involved members of the middle class (Castells 1978). Later on, Castells recognized that class analysis was insufficient for understanding the way cities and social urban movements changed in the course of history. As Lupač and Sládek (2007) point out, Castells realized that urban movements involved diverse social groups which were protecting their particular interests by means of particular tools; e.g. subcultures demanding their own spaces, social groups demanding dignified housing, or various political groups trying to become involved in decision-making (2007). Castells, in his new cross-cultural analysis, involved attention to the human agency and focused on “the sources of historical structures and urban meaning”, and on discovering “the complex mechanisms of interaction between different and conflicting sources of urban reproduction and urban change” (1983, p. 335). In his later work, Castells abandoned his Marxist approach and changed the main area of his interest towards the development of the new technologies in relation to the changes in the world’s economy. However, even his later research was still linked to the city and urban life.

### **2.1.2 Radical geography and the city**

Even though some scholars eventually abandoned Marxism, the Marxist approach did not disappear from urban studies. In fact, it experienced one of its many renaissances with the occurrence of radical geography. With the extent of attention Marxist sociologists and philosophers had devoted to urban issues in their theoretical work, geography professionals could no longer remain idle. Reflecting on the rising popularity of critical social theory in the 1970s and 1980s, geographers finally recognized the shortcomings of quantitative methods,

and introduced a new approach to the geographical research, which then gave rise to *radical geography*, the most radical offshoot of what later became known as *critical geography*, and took up the geographical work of its radical predecessors, such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchists Élisée Reclus and Peter Kropotkin, and the second wave of Hegelian Marxists recruiting from the Frankfurt school of critical theory, as well as the urban Marxists in France. The most prominent personality in radical geography, David Harvey, was originally a conventional urban geographer who discovered Marxism later in his career through dealing with a research issue that called for an approach that transgressed neutral scientific objectivity. By applying Marxism, Harvey (1973) was able to explain subtle mechanisms of urbanization as a mode of capitalist production. According to his notion, the cities we encounter in the contemporary capitalist society are products created by the dynamics of forces of the constantly changing market system, in which the systematic requirement for everlasting growth of the land and property value is continually being pushed forward through unceasing commercial property development, as well as unceasing destruction, displacement, and workforce exploitation. The spaces in our cities shaped by capitalism are therefore suited for the needs of capital accumulation, which frequently leads to undesirable results in terms of their livability for people.

#### **2.1.2.1 The circulation of surplus value**

Much of Harvey's work is inspired by Lefebvre's earlier approaches towards urbanization. Both Lefebvre and Harvey saw the city as a product of the circulation of surplus value, which according to Lefebvre (1970) circulated in two distinct types of circulation, re-interpreted by Harvey in the following way: the first circle turns "naturally occurring materials and forces into objects and power of utility to man", while the second circle "involves the creation and extraction of surplus value out of speculation in property rights and out of returns gained from the disbursement of fixed capital investments" (Harvey 1973, p. 312).

Harvey notices how, in the interest of capital accumulation, this circulation of surplus value is being accelerated through an accordingly increased production of fixed space. But the more capitalism needs to produce fixed space, the more it also "perpetually creates barriers to its own further development" (Harvey 2001, p. 83), which it later seeks to eliminate; "capitalism thereby produces a geographical landscape appropriate to its own dynamic of accumulation at a particular moment of its history, only to have to destroy and rebuild that geographical landscape to accommodate accumulation at a later date" (Harvey 2000, p. 58-

59). Harvey points out that surplus value circulating in a manner that produces such geographies is very insecure, and often leads to failures and crisis. Insecurity has, however, become an entrenched condition of the latest form of capitalism, which Harvey calls “flexible accumulation”<sup>5</sup> (1989a, 2001); a system bound to the production of perpetual crisis tending to increase in severity as attempts to solve it only steps further towards an ever more flexible ways of sustaining economic growth. It is during this perpetual crisis especially that the main contradictions of capitalism, in terms of its desirability for the development of human society, become the most obvious. The ability of capitalism to deliver affluence and progress is in direct conflict with its inherent production of masses of unemployed and impoverished people, and devastated or depreciated landscapes and townscapes. The over-accumulation and over-production, in combination with growing inequalities of surplus value distribution among populations, are both the source and the symptom of financial crisis.

#### **2.1.2.2 Uneven development**

The above described contradictions of capital are interrelated with Karl Marx’s concept of uneven development, and were put into a geographical context and further theorized by Neil Smith, the most eminent of David Harvey’s students. According to Smith’s notion, uneven development is “a systematic geographic expression of the contradiction inherent in the very constitution and structure of capital” (Smith 1984, p. xiii). The keystone of this geographical unevenness is the fact that continual surplus value production is conditioned by capital constantly moving towards areas with higher profit rates. This ultimately means that disinvestment in certain areas happens for the sake of concentrating capital elsewhere. This concentration leads to “the centralization of capital”, which “often proceeds faster in association with economic crisis, when the social capital is shrinking”. In other words, the centralization and valorization of capital often occurs at the cost of social capital, and among others also involves physical centralization of use values and human labor (1984, p. 121-123). However, concentrating capital also leads to its over-accumulation into built environments and its consequent devaluation (Harvey 1982, Smith 1984).

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<sup>5</sup> Flexible accumulation “is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labor processes, labor markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation”. Flexible accumulation has also changed the patterns of uneven development between sectors and geographical regions, and has resulted in “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989a, p. 147).

Neil Smith became particularly renowned for demonstrating uneven geographical development using the example of gentrification, an urban process that was first designed as capital returning to deteriorated inner cities. This process that was first simply understood as a proliferation of the middle class into centrally located areas affected by disinvestment and deindustrialization, was interpreted by Smith (1996) as an outcome of the interplay between urban policy and the private market in the context of a neoliberal economy. Gentrification is often viewed and promoted as a new urban frontier, a positive symptom of economic progress and profitability. However, many scholars bring evidence that colonizing certain parts of an inner city with new capital goes hand in hand with the displacement of the former population and revanchist policies against socially and economically weaker populations (Marcuse 1985; Smith 1996; Atkinson 2000). Gentrification later expanded as a new global urbanization phenomenon into many different locations across the world and took on many new forms.

### **2.1.3 Marxism and the socialistic city**

In Central and Eastern Europe, before anticommunist revolutions swept across in 1989, the cities were built with the aim to create a socially just society devoid of capitalism and its inherent production of inequalities (Sýkora 2009). At that time, Marxist philosophy used to be a mainstream component of the higher education provided by the state. However, the philosophy was abused for ideological purposes, leaving the Leninist or Stalinist versions as part of the curriculum. The socialist principles that were employed in shaping cities for the socialist society were therefore adapted to this ideologically misrepresented version. The tradition of Marxist urbanism as described in chapter n. 2.1 never had any significant influence on the urbanization processes in communist cities. Neither were there attempts to employ dialectical materialism in order to scrutinize and challenge the contradictions within the socialistic society itself; e.g., to tackle the way the production of cities was submitted to the totalitarian ideology, or the way the priorities of the ruling communist party resulted in new types of socio-spatial inequalities. Socialist cities were built in a way that partially reduced social inequalities at the cost of reducing people's franchise to actively participate in designing urban production and their freedom to democratically decide how urban spaces were inhabited and used. This top-down socialistic approach towards decision-making in urban planning and undemocratic housing allocation bureaucracy produced people's far-

reaching alienation from their cities and neighborhoods. With regard to the omnipresent scarcity, gloomy grayness, lack of personal freedoms and trampled dignity, this alienation from the socialist city felt more tangible and profound than that from a capitalistic city, which is successful in pacifying people's awakening through placid consumption.

## **2.2 Categories of alternative spaces in the capitalist society**

In the preceding chapters we saw that Marxist geographers are extremely critical of the detrimental way in which uneven development in capitalistic society impacts the spaces and societal groups that cannot compete in environments shaped by market driven urban processes. Only those groups and members of the society who are able to and willing to play by the rules set up by market relations, can survive, while the ones who fail must be displaced. Alternative spaces are, by definition, extremely vulnerable to the pressures of the dominant order; not only do they fail to play by the market rules, but they also face disadvantages due to the general antagonism of the hegemonic order and mainstream society which sees them as abnormal deviations, and therefore push for their elimination by means of the legal and normative system.

Alternative spaces are not all the same. Based on different factors we can differentiate between them in various ways; e.g. based on their deviation from the dominant society, based on their purpose, or based on their relation to the dominant society. The following chapters will outline three different categorizations:

- 1) The first categorization divides alternative spaces based on how they deviate from the generally recognized goals and standard means of achieving them. The outcome of this categorization is a typology of modes of alternative spatial adaptations, inspired by Merton's (1938) theory of social deviation.
- 2) The second chapter divides alternative spaces according to their purpose. This chapter will also introduce particular types of alternative spaces and spatial practices.
- 3) The third chapter divides alternative spaces based on how they co-exist and interact with the rest of the society and other spatial forms, as well as how they conform or resist to the dominant societal rules.



### 2.2.1 Deviance from the mainstream society

The mainstream society perceives alternative spaces and their users as abnormal due to their deviation from the established societal standards. According to Merton's (1938) theory of social deviation, contemporary society is tied by generally recognized goals and standard means of achieving these goals; people who do not conform to these goals and standard means of achieving them are considered deviant by the society. Merton distinguished five different scales of an individuals' deviation: the so-called *conformist* – who do not deviate at all, *ritualists* and *innovators* – who deviate only partly, and *retreatists* and *rebels* – who are the most deviant (see Table 1.).

**Table 1.** Typology of Modes of Individual Adaptation

Modes of Adaptation	Goals (values)	Standard Means	Explanation
Conformity	+	+	Acceptance of the culturally defined goals and the socially legitimate means of achieving them. Merton suggests that most individuals, even those who do not have easy access to the means and goals, remain conformists.
Innovation	+	-	Acceptance of the goals of society, but rejection or lack of the socially legitimate means of achieving them. Innovation is most associated with criminal behavior, helping to explain the high rate of crime committed by uneducated and poor individuals who do not have access to legitimate means of achieving the social goals of wealth and power.
Ritualism	-	+	Acceptance of a lifestyle of hard work, but rejection of the cultural goal of monetary rewards. This individual goes through the motions of getting an education and working hard, yet is not committed to the goal of accumulating wealth or power.
Retreatism	-	-	Rejection of both the cultural goal of success and the socially legitimate means of achieving it. The retreatists withdraw or retreat from society and may become alcoholic, drug addicts, or vagrants.
Rebellion	+/-	+/-	Rejection of both culturally defined goals and means, substitution of new goals and means. For example, rebels may use social or political activism to replace the goal of personal wealth with the goal of social justice and equality.
Key + = acceptance of/access to, - = rejection of/lack of access to, +/- = rejection of culturally defined goals and structurally defined means and replacement with new goals and means			

Source: bolender.com

As shown in Table 2., an adapted version of Merton's categories of deviance can be also applied to alternative spaces and alternative spatial practices. Their deviation can be ranked on the basis of the way they transgress established patterns of spatial organization, social norms and sometimes even legal frameworks applied in the mainstream society, as well as on the basis of activities, lifestyles, aspirations, values and beliefs they embed.

**Table 2.** Typology of Modes of Alternative Spatial Adaptation

Modes of Adaptation	Type of deviation	Examples
Conformists spaces	No deviation from the societal standards.	Mainstream spaces, spaces for the mainstream society.
Innovative spaces	Unconventional spaces but conventional goals – e.g. capital accumulation.	Gay villages, experimental art projects, temporary use of residual areas.
Ritualist spaces	Features of other standard spaces, but various non-standard practices and lifestyles.	Life in alternative collectives.
Retreatist spaces	Spaces for life detached from the rest of the society.	Self-sufficient ecovillages, the back-to-land movement, or also various nomadic lifestyles, <i>freetekno</i> travelers.
Rebellious spaces	Political resistance and organizing, activism.	Political squats, social centers, infocafes, protest camps.

Source: Author

According to Merton, social deviance is a product of inequalities and imperfections in the hegemonic social order (1938). The same holds for the deviance in spaces and spatial practices. Most spaces and spatial practices that are contemporarily considered deviant are products of the socio-economic inequalities of the capitalistic society and its orientation towards individual profit and consumption. These spaces are deviant because they are lacking behind or dissent from the dominant *modus operandi* and constitute a disruption, or an anomaly, in the terrains for capital accumulation. The rule of the neoliberal political-economic system presses for the elimination of such disruptions, since they do not generate profit, and sometimes even actively oppose the idea of being profit oriented. Some alternative spaces might also be profit-oriented, but their alternativeness is based on a different type of exceptionality or marginality, e.g. unusual appearance or concentration of sexual minorities etc.

### 2.2.2 Purpose of alternative spaces

This chapter attempts to distinguish alternative spaces and spatial practices through categories based on their main purpose. My dissertation project predominantly focuses on spaces which are established out of free will of their users, and whose main purpose is to cultivate a particular type of culture, lifestyle, or politics. However, I will also introduce alternative spaces which are created for the purpose of survival, by people who struggle in their daily

life. Despite the fact that many alternative spaces can serve both purposes, there are important distinguishing features among the two categories. Spaces for survival are predominantly established by unprivileged and disadvantaged socio-economic groups with limited access to resources, such as the global poor, homeless and landless people, refugees, etc. These groups typically establish alternative spaces out of necessity and a lack of other options. On the other hand, alternative spaces for a particular type of culture, lifestyle, or politics are created or occupied deliberately, usually by individuals or groups with special needs, tastes, and desires which often result from feelings of alienation or anomie in relation to the dominant social order and its prevailing norms, culture, aesthetics, and spatial organization. These people often see their alternative spatial practices as a way of protesting against a lack of affordable housing and workspaces, or against the expensiveness and standardization of entertainment and spaces for socializing. These people are not necessarily excluded from the society. Instead of conforming to the limited options that the dominant society offers they make a pro-active choice to create their own options.

In this chapter, each of these two main categories will be divided into several subcategories based on the motivations and societal position of their users. In each subcategory, I will introduce different types of alternative spaces and alternative spatial practices that can be encountered in the capitalism driven society.

#### **2.2.2.1 Alternative spaces established for the purpose of survival**

Around the whole world there are groups of people who suffer from lack of space which they need in order to survive. Even in socialist regimes, totalitarian governments and a shortage economy that does not provide people with enough resources might put people under stress. Global capitalism on the other hand, produces inherent socio-economic inequalities, which victimize the most vulnerable members of the society, such as young people, seniors, unskilled workforce, minorities and other societal groups living on the margins of the society. Populations that are entirely excluded from the job market or serve as underpaid labor are accordingly denied access to basic resources, such as livelihood or housing. As a result, the excluded societal groups have no other option but to secure their survival in various spontaneous and unofficial ways.

Employment of spontaneous survival practices used to be quite usual in the U.S. and European history (Corr 1999), but contemporarily, such practices most frequently occur in developing countries where the detrimental effects of global capitalism on local populations

are intensified by widespread poverty, insufficient tradition of democratic rule, and high rates of human rights abuse (see England and Nault 2010). The most diverse and elaborate survival practices are employed in the region of Latin America, which has a history of being a site where the most extreme models of neoliberal economy were first tested, and where consequent economic crisis led to profound societal changes (see Robinson 2004<sup>6</sup>). Compared to other regions, Latin-American inhabitants have so far been the most active and successful in defending informal settlements, squatting land, or taking over factories etc. In past decades, neoliberal restructuring has also severely impacted populations in developed countries, and an increasing percentage of people in Europe and North America have been facing a threat of life under the poverty line and homelessness.

According to Corr (1999), land and housing occupations are one of the most important manifestations of “the decentralized yet worldwide struggle to redistribute economic resources according to a more egalitarian and efficient pattern” (1999, p. 3). We will now overview some of the most typical forms of alternative spaces that embody the manifestation of this struggle:

- **Land occupations:** Populations that cannot escape from poverty and cannot afford to pay rent for agrarian land can secure basic food supplies through land squats or guerrilla gardening in unused urban spaces (see Reynolds 2009). Probably the highest number of agricultural land occupations exists in Latin America (Corr 1999). Intentional agricultural communities existed also in Great Britain, where the so-called “diggers” reacted to Industrial Revolution, and through a landrights campaign fought for their right to live and work on the land in an ecologically sustainable way (Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006).
- **Housing occupations:** Predominantly in the U.S. and European urban areas, people in need of dwellings can opt for the tactic of occupying vacant unused buildings. One of the first massive waves of squatting took place in Britain after the First World War, when returning soldiers did not get houses they had been promised by the government and consequently started occupying abandoned buildings. In Great Britain, squatting was a widespread “adaptive mechanism for coping with intensified housing stress” until about the 1970s

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/robinson/Assets/pdf/new%20pdfs/global\\_crisis.pdf](http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/robinson/Assets/pdf/new%20pdfs/global_crisis.pdf)

(Kearns 1979, p. 589). At the time of welfare politics and a predominance of publicly allocated housing, squatting in many European cities “became widely ‘accepted’ by authorities as an economically favorable way of preventing empty buildings’ degeneration, as well as an alternative tenure form” for populations excluded from the rental sector (1979, p. 598). However, under the current neoliberal restructuring, the people’s ability to acquire homes, as well as their vulnerability to homelessness, have been further intensified. Most of public housing policy has been shifted under corporate control, and governments have made squatting much more difficult through legal restrictions. Pruijt (2004) also argues that in comparison with the 1980’s boom of the European squatter movement, the supply of squattable empty buildings has considerably decreased. Nonetheless, occupations of abandoned buildings as a housing solution have existed up to this day, such as e.g. in case of the squatted *The Grande Hotel* in Beira, Mozambique<sup>7</sup>, or the squatted unfinished skyscraper owned by David Brillembourg in Caracas, Venezuela.<sup>8</sup>

- **Unofficial settlements:** Inhabitants of unofficial settlements are sometimes referred to as squatters, because they live on land that they do not own, nonetheless, we distinguish them here, because they do not occupy abandoned buildings, but build their own shelters. Developing countries have especially been experiencing an unfettered growth of cities and urban populations. Some people come to cities from the countryside in search of better work, while others are the “surplus population” pushed out by cities, where market prices of housing are accessible only to the upper social strata. People who cannot afford official housing therefore build unofficial settlements on the cities’ edges. Such settlements are also known as shantytowns, slums, or *favelas* as they are called in Brazil (see Davis 2006, Lloyd 1979).
- **Occupied factories:** In Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela, many factories were abandoned or closed-down by their owners, and consequently reclaimed by workers who started to run them as autonomous cooperatives.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/02/07/grande.hotel.mozambique/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://sm3.blog.cz/1103/squatting-ve-venezuelskem-caracasu-aneb-obsad-si-svuj-mrakodrap>

One of the defining characteristics of these occupied factories is that they are based on solidarity and an absence of exploitation. In cooperatively managed factories workers share different tasks as well as profits, and participate in democratic decision-making as equal members of the worker-cooperative assemblies (Trigona 2006, Ranis 2006).

#### **2.2.2.2 Alternative spaces as a deliberate choice of spatial arrangement**

The structure of modern society is almost entirely based on relations mediated by money and consumption. These relations are also reflected in the production of urban space and the way urban space is used. An increasing number of people are therefore becoming estranged from spaces that perpetuate this gradual commodification over an increasing number of aspects of human life. A growing number of people are developing feelings of alienation or anomie towards such a profit-driven society, and are rejecting its socio-economic order, politics, ideologies, power structures, norms, values, aspirations, standardized and sterile aesthetics, etc. These people escape from society to their own islands of freedom and resistance, where they can live and pursue their activities in accordance with the values and attitudes they preach, or create environments that suit their needs, desires and tastes.

This category of deliberately created spaces will be divided, based on the main motivation of their users, into three groups: spaces of resistance, spaces for alternative culture and experimentation, and spaces of alternative lifestyle:

#### **Spaces of resistance**

Inherent to every society is always a certain amount of the population that refuses the hegemonic order, and professes cultures and lifestyles that differ from that which is advocated by the dominant official ideology. Groups that oppose and resist the mainstream society and its existing modus operandi are the so-called countercultures. Most countercultures blend with alternative youth subcultures, but their unifying distinguishing attribute is a profound antagonism towards the officially established culture, politics, and societal norms, ideas and values (see Roszak 1969).

Countercultures typically create their own spaces of resistance, where they can practice their alternative ideas, politics, culture and social life. Main actors in these spaces are predominantly young people, activists, members of alternative subcultures, artists, sexual minorities, and other predominantly culturally or bodily marginalized groups. These actors

refuse the rules and constraints imposed upon them by the dominant societal order, and their spaces of resistance provide them with an alternative refuge that matches their authentic lifestyle, values and taste, enabling them to discuss and co-operate with other like people, and pursue creative and experimental activities. Also, since most protest-oriented initiatives are rather ephemeral and purpose-built, Chatterton and Hodkinson (2006) claim that it is increasingly important that spaces exist which can function as established bases of resistance, and which contemporary oppositional initiatives and groups can use for regrouping and political organizing.

Countercultures always serve as an indicator of some type of societal problems. Generally, the more oppressive the regime, and the more frustrated the society, the better the breeding ground for countercultures. On the other hand, countercultures in totalitarian regimes are systematically being eliminated, leaving most spaces of countercultural resistance to be found in capitalistic countries, where the desire to eliminate countercultures can be complicated by the capitalistic regimes' endeavor to retain a seemingly democratic character to their rule. Nonetheless, due to the unconventional way countercultures present themselves and establish their spaces, it is fairly easy for the dominant regime to complicate their existence by means of publicly delegitimizing their practices and ideas, and by eliminating their spaces through market forces.

Spaces of countercultural resistance are typically self-managed and based on D.I.Y. principles<sup>9</sup>. They are established in various unconventional ways that can range from squatting vacant buildings, establishing trailer parks, organizing illegal cultural events, parties and festivals in rural areas or empty warehouses, to protest oriented street parties and carnivals. The dominant society is admonished to perceive these strategies and practices as subversive, undemocratic, and potentially dangerous. However, in Western Europe most of the countercultural movements emerged at the end of the 1970s and in 1980s, in the context of an economic recession, high unemployment, a lack of affordable housing or spaces for socializing and entertainment, and in the overall depressive climate of the Cold War. Consequently, countercultural practices can be understood as a creative and pro-active way of using different spaces to challenge and deal with the limitations of contemporary society.

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<sup>9</sup> D.I.Y. is an acronym, meaning do-it-yourself, often used to describe the approach people take to creating, building, fixing or managing things independently, without the help of professionals.

- **Political squats:** Squatting vacant buildings does not have to be just a housing solution or a result of one's societal nonsuccess. It can also be a political act that criticizes a lack of affordable decent housing, property speculation, or injustices of the capitalistic redistribution of resources. Squatting can also be a form of protest against the notion of private ownership and housing commodification. Due to the current deterioration of the welfare state, the increasing protection of private property, and the strengthening role of economic forces, squatting has become much more complicated, socially undesirable, but paradoxically, also an increasingly necessary and practical way of facing growing social insecurity.

#### **Box 1. European Squatting Movement in the 1980s**

Squatting movement in the 1980s has been one of the most important youth movements in Europe. Although squatting as a practice had already existed much longer, this time predominantly young people started to occupy abandoned and unused properties in order to acquire spaces for not only residential, but also political, social and cultural purposes. The most famous traditional hubs of squatting can be found in the Netherlands (esp. Amsterdam), Germany (esp. Berlin and Hamburg), Great Britain (esp. London), Copenhagen, and Barcelona. During the 1980s, apart from challenging growing corporate control over cities and housing issues, squatting also became a reflection of "a much wider rejection of life, work and politics under capitalism" (Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006, 205). Squatting can take various different forms, depending on the character and aspirations of their users, and on the social and political context of the surroundings. Occasionally, it can also take the form of collectively-run trailer parks semi-permanently parked on unused urban land. During the peak of the squatting movement, many vacant properties were occupied and consequently evicted, but some squats survived longer than others and some even turned into famous cultural and political projects; e.g. Berlin's *Köpi*, Amsterdam's *Nieuwmarkt* or the famous squatted borough of *Christiania* in Copenhagen. Also, one Czech squat, the farmstead *Ladronka* in Prague, evicted in 2000 after seven years of its existence, was known internationally. Thanks to this movement, squatting as a deliberately made choice of living arrangement became a popular form of expressing a radical political stance.

- **Social centers, infocafés, clubrooms:** Various self-managed unofficial spaces for non-profit grassroots cultural production and entertainment, social



meetings, and political organization. They serve as autonomous spaces for libraries, workshops, concerts, alternative publishing, and political debates, and have great potential to help young people that are socio-economically disadvantaged or feel alienated from the mainstream society. Particularly in difficult times of economic austerity, social insecurity, and high unemployment, alternative spaces operated on noncommercial principles can provide these socially vulnerable groups with the opportunity to remain active, meet their peers, control their own lives, create alternative networks for social reproduction, and organize to defend their interests (see Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006, Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006).

**Box 2. Self-Managed Social Centers (the CSAs) in Italy**

During Italy's difficult transition from Fordism to a regime of flexible accumulation, young people were hugely affected by unemployment and increasing poverty. In reaction to contemporary politics and the gradual disappearance of traditional public spaces and meeting places, young people occupied abandoned buildings transforming them through collective action into semi-legal venues for political, social and cultural events. Mudu (2004) says that these centers had a positive effect in suppressing marginalization and exclusion processes in Italian cities. A lot of these centers were later closed, but new ones emerged. Some of them still exist today, however, Chatterton and Hodkinson (2006) point out that some of the CSA's that still operate have become part of the mainstream night entertainment.

- **Protest and Peace Camps:** Temporary settlements set up by activists in a particular location serve either as a base for protesters or as a means of direct action; its physical presence can either halt the process that is being protested, e.g., ecological protesters blocking access roads for loggers, or the camp itself serving as a symbolic manifestation of protest, such as the global *Occupy* movement, during which almost one thousand of the so-called *occupations* were held in more than eighty countries. The protest, aimed at socio-economic inequalities and particularly the growing gap between the richest 1% of the world's population and the remaining 99%, started on September 17 2011. At

the time of writing this project, the *Occupy* movement is still an integral part of the international debates concerning the on-going socio-economic crisis.

- **Street party protests:** Street party can play an important role as a tool for protest or for drawing public attention to some kind of problem. Typically activists shut down a street as a symbolic way of reclaiming public space, or alternative youth attempt to defend their interests in the form of a carnival with sound systems transported in allegoric cars.

### **Spaces for alternative culture and experimentation**

In particular, artists, students, alternative youth, and a specific mix of bohemian and creative middle class people with a sense of creativity and originality avoid standardized consumer goods and corporate-sponsored culture. Instead they search for original and financially accessible spaces that can be used for alternative cultural activities, and where experimentation, innovativeness and creativity can be fully employed. As a result they search for abandoned, unused, dilapidated, and other types of unconventional and atypical low-budget spaces, which are financially affordable and suitable for experimental activities and cultural pioneering. These can be typically found in areas affected by disinvestment and deindustrialization, such as working-class ethnic neighborhoods, industrial buildings and brownfields, and other abandoned or dilapidated buildings and spaces. Unlike conventional society, young adventurous practitioners and pursuers of alternative culture find these crumbling spaces appealing and inspiring. On top of that, these settings offer a lot of vacant space, cheap rent, original historical settings, cultural diversity, and a sense of adventure. They can provide spacious workplaces for artists and their artwork, rehearsal rooms for band practices, cheap rents for young people and students, and unconventional settings for alternative fairs, flea markets, art festivals, art studios, galleries, even music clubs, cultural centers, and illegal free parties.

#### **Box 3. *Urban Catalyst***

A European research group *Urban Catalyst* researched five chosen European metropolises and mapped activities occurring in urban residual areas. The research revealed that such areas provided opportunities for new, unplanned activities, which

ranged from art, music and pop culture to new forms of informal economies, nightlife and entertainment. In their conclusion the researchers suggested that, especially in the context of economic stagnation, existing or potential temporary uses of residual spaces could act as a motor of urban change that can challenge existing conventional urban planning and development in cities that are undergoing postindustrial transformation. Furthermore, it was argued that due to the low-costs and temporality, urban residual areas are more accepting towards uncertainty, potential failure, naivety and daring, and as a result they often serve as a platform for “the most current development in popular culture, art and new media”. Abandoned sites could therefore operate as “a Breeding ground, a laboratory or a test site for new kinds of activities where experiments can be carried out with low financial risk” (Urban Catalyst 2004, p. 15).

- **Art squats / squat clubs:** Due to their need for cheap space, artists and musicians sometimes squat vacant buildings which can be found anywhere in the city. Art squats are especially attractive for passer-bys and tourists due to their unconventional design; in some cities they can play the role of a tourist attraction. Because of their creative and economic potential, local authorities sometimes make strategic provisions for their legalization. This approach towards art squats and squat clubs is highly discriminatory towards other squats (see Uitermark 2004). A famous squat that serves both artists and clubbing is *Tacheles*, a squatted one-hundred-year-old shopping center in the very center of Berlin (see Shaw 2006). Many artists' squats can be found in London, Paris, Amsterdam, and other cities. In Berlin, many squatted breweries and warehouses used for music production eventually became legalized clubbing venues.
- **Experimental art projects:** Artists, designers, architects, and other creative professionals or students sometimes occupy abandoned industrial areas and transform them into experimental cultural centers. They usually make barter agreements with the owners of these spaces, or with municipalities. Their projects are then sponsored by different grants, or by private philanthropists. In some instances, developers or municipalities address the artists and cooperate with them for the purpose of revitalization and gentrification projects.

#### **Box 4. NDSM docks**

*NDSM* docks are an example of a large-scale alternative redevelopment of a residual urban area; an old ship construction wharf in Amsterdam North which has been transformed by an experimental art collective *Kinetic North*<sup>10</sup>. They had won a municipally announced competition by proposing a project of turning the derelict *NDSM* into an experimental, multi-disciplinary cultural environment with low-profit art, culture and crafts production.

- **Temporary cultural programs:** As outlined in the *Urban Catalyst* research, residual urban areas can serve for a vast spectrum of uses. Some cultural projects have embraced the notion of transience and use different empty spaces as unique settings for the theatre, exhibitions, concerts, social events, fairs, and markets.

#### **Box 5. Temporary Autonomous Art Events and Exhibitions (TAA)**

TAA is one of many projects inspired by Hakim Bay's concept of the "temporary autonomous zone" ("TAZ") (see Box 8). "TAZ" is an initiative started by British collective called *the Random Artists*. Drawing on D.I.Y. principles, TAA creates uncurated spaces for diverse "art and expression outside of the establish artworld elites" by means of "reclaiming and reusing derelict urban spaces". The collective's aim is to "create an effect of hope and beauty, unified through the use of free space" (TAA, 2011).<sup>11</sup>

- **Free Parties:** Many young people prefer independent, non-profit, and D.I.Y. culture rather than the commercial one. Free culture events are sponsored and organized only from within the community itself. They constitute popular, ritualized cultural events where music can be collectively experienced in a free-spirited and inclusive environment. "Free parties" and "free festivals" often take place in illegally occupied settings – empty warehouses, military shelters, underneath highway bridges, or in various rural and natural places.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.template.com/tool-pool/onecfe2.html?tool\\_id=4073](http://www.template.com/tool-pool/onecfe2.html?tool_id=4073)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.taaexhibitions.org/>

Unlike sterile and consumption-oriented corporate venues, free parties are financially accessible, and outside of disciplining surveillance. Participants usually pay no fee, or just a symbolic payment. A free party goes on over the whole night. Free festivals can last several days, occasionally even longer than a week. For some people, free parties may be just another kind of hedonistic and financially affordable entertainment, but part of the scene, especially the core organizers, conceives free parties as a manifestation of a countercultural political resistance against the profit and consumption oriented mainstream society.

#### **Box 6. *Freetekno***

*Freetekno* is a special type of subculture and electronic dance music that evolved around free parties and raves in the UK. The most devoted participants of the *freetekno* scene live nomadic lives in campers and vans loaded with sound systems and organize free parties as they travel. This lifestyle was inspired by the movement of hippies and the British new age travelers, who had been the first subcultures to organize rave parties. Some of the UK free festivals held in 1970s and 1980s used to be attended by tens of thousands of people. In 1980s free parties started to be enriched by electronic club music and by the anarchistic philosophies of punks and squatters. In 1994, free parties and festivals were made illegal by two bills passed by the British government – the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (see St John 2009).

The scene then moved from the UK to other European countries, with Czechia becoming one of the most popular hubs and a host of a huge annually held illegal *freetekno* festival called *CzechTek* (see Wimmer 2006). After the brutal, government ordered police suppression of the 2005 *CzechTek*, the scene moved further east in Europe. However, it keeps surviving in most European countries, either illegally or in various semi-legalized ways. The scene exists also in North America, Australia, and other predominantly developed countries. Nonetheless, all kinds of free parties and reunions are organized all around the world, especially in attractive settings (e.g. Siberian taiga, south African desert, Thai beaches etc.). Travelling to such events has become a new alternative way of tourism.

#### **Spaces of alternative lifestyle**

All the alternative spaces outlined above can be also understood as spatial manifestations of

alternative lifestyles. However, besides that, they are also manifestations of alternative spatial practices that have been divided into categories on the grounds of their distinguishing features. To describe all the other spaces for alternative lifestyles would mean to capture the innumerable ways in which people can practice alternative lifestyles and the innumerable different spaces and locations they can inhabit while doing so. Their plurality is beyond the capacity of this dissertation project. Spaces for alternative lifestyle might comprise a nudist beach, an Amish village inhabited by a religious minority, or an ecological center in the middle of a city. It also has to be taken into account, that the way spaces are viewed as alternative always depends on the perspective of the respective culture. At the same time, alternative lifestyles might be pursued without inhabiting spaces that deviate from the rest of the mainstreams spatial forms, while some alternative spaces might be inhabited without its users pursuing any alternative lifestyle.

Therefore, in this category, I will focus only on those spaces and spatial practices which are perceived as alternative from the perspective of the Euro-American culture, and which are deliberate spatial manifestations of alternative lifestyles and do not fit into any of the first three categories. They are predominantly manifestations of people's desire to live in ways which are less alienated, less destructive, more natural, ecological, sustainable and social.

- **Back-to-the-land movement:** The trend, also known as the counter-urbanization, refers to people who migrate from cities to rural areas in search of a more natural and sustainable life, typically on a small farm. Jacob (1997) divides the *counterurbanists* into seven groups: Weekenders, who keep their daily jobs in the city; pensioners, who live off their pensions; country romantics, who work only part-time or seasonally and spend the rest of their time on their farm; country entrepreneurs, who use their property in the country for small business that is not directly involved in farming; purists, who try to live off their own crops, and sell only a small amount of their crops for profit; micro-farmers, who grow crops for profit; apprentices, who get the back-to-the land experience through working for the more experienced members of the movement (1997).
- **Ecovillages:** Intentional communities which can exist in rural or urban areas.

Their inhabitants try to escape wasteful and destructive lifestyles and instead live in a “socially and personally satisfying, and ecologically sound” way (Van Schyndel Kasper 2008, p. 13). Ecovillages typically use alternative energy, ecological materials, permaculture, and try to be self-sustainable in terms of the supply of water, food, power etc.

- **Communes:** Communes are small groups of approximately less than 20 people who intentionally live together and thereby constitute an alternative to the nuclear family. Members of a commune share similar values and interests. They profess egalitarian values and are connected by emotional bonds. Decisions in communes are collectively made. Communes may be interconnected on different grounds, e.g. environmentalism, atypical sexual orientation or lifestyle, religion, eating restrictions, or areas of interest.
- **Nomadic lifestyles:** Modern travelers and nomads are often members of various alternative subcultures or countercultures who seek freedom and a refuge from stereotypical mainstream life by constantly travelling or living in a nomadic way. Some people travel and live in vans and caravans; others use different types of transportation and accommodation. The so called *new tribes*<sup>12</sup> exist in the form of mobile communities whose journey is demarcated by the locations of music festivals and fairs.
- **Gay villages:** Urban areas predominantly inhabited and frequented by sexual minorities, also known as the *LGBT* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender). Residents and businesses in these neighborhoods are predominantly gay. Historically, ostracized sexual minorities used to settle down in rundown urban areas, which they then helped to develop. Nowadays, gay villages are popular hip tourist destinations with upscale bars, retail and trendy nightlife.

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<sup>12</sup> Maffesoli (1996, 2002) uses the term neotribalism to describe postmodern nomadic communities, whose lifestyle is a way of extricating from the declining modernist society, and a refusal of its static existence in individualized and yet uniform “territories”. Neotribes voluntarily choose to live modest intercommunal lives on the margins of a mass society that is possessed by consumerism and a lack of reciprocity. According to Maffesoli, the dynamism of nomadic life provides more stability than unchanging static existence, and allows its practitioners to experience universal humanistic values instead of values that are imposed upon them by the hegemonic societal structure.

### **2.2.3 Alternative spaces in relation to the mainstream: The rate of deviance**

In terms of their co-existence and interaction with societal and spatial surroundings, as well as their attitude towards the dominant societal rules, alternative spaces and their users can range from one extreme to another. I suggest that the extent to which alternative spaces deny the rules, norms, tastes and values of the mainstream society can be characterized as a rate of deviance from the mainstream society. The relationship of alternative spaces with capitalism, current legal frameworks, and the dominant societal order can range from radical opposition, resistance, to acceptance or even assistance. Some alternative spaces aspire to be independent and maximize their detachment, while others maintain active relations with the rest of the society. Some spaces operate in accordance with the rules of the hegemonic order, and some disrupt them or challenge them. The same holds for the alternative spaces' adherence to legal systems; in terms of their legal status, alternative spaces vary in the extent to which they break the law i.e. their existence in relation to the established societal rules may be legal, semi-legal, or illegal.

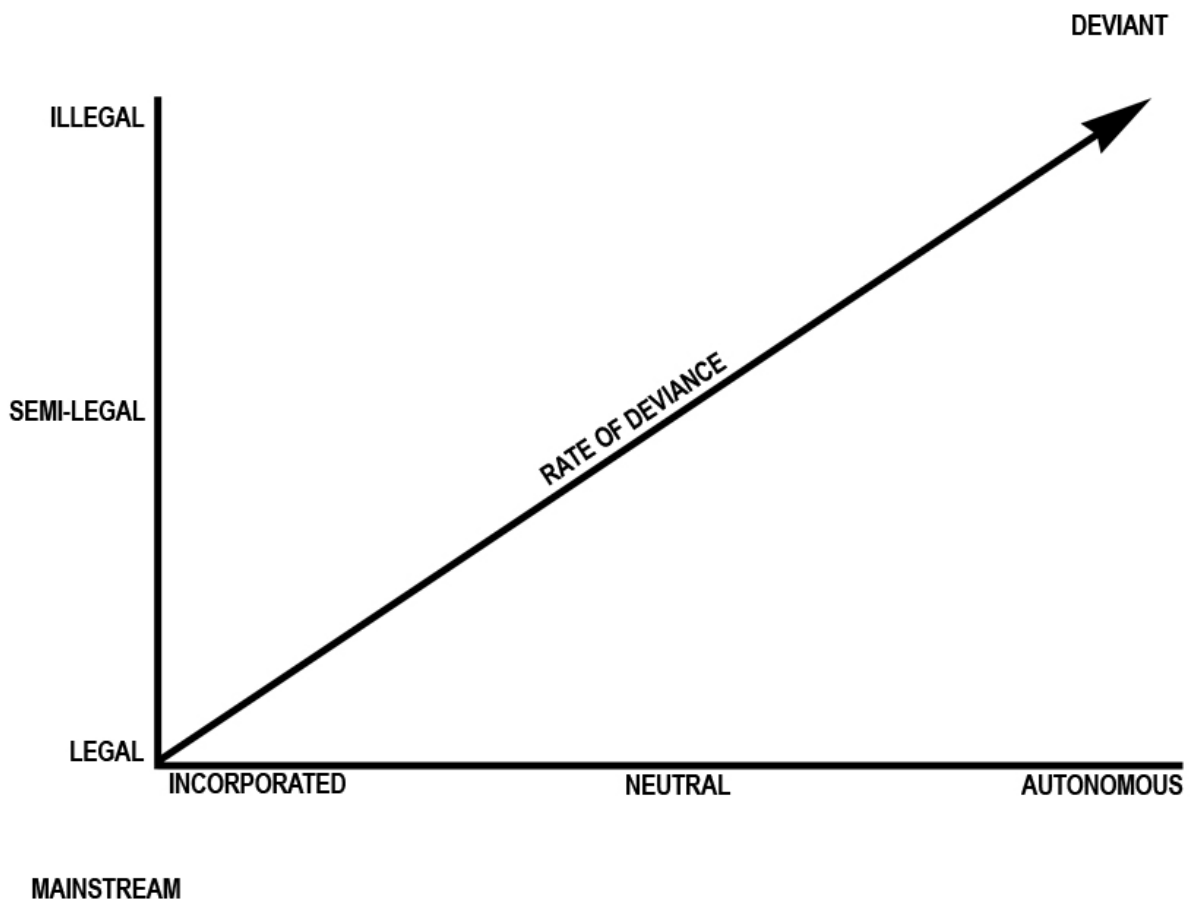
By not conforming to them, alternative spaces are reflecting the weaknesses of the dominant society and its spatial organization. Despite the fact that their mere existence is offering a partial solution to these weaknesses, alternative spaces typically face an extremely adverse environment, in which a multitude of specific tools are used towards their elimination or adaptation in the name of reinforcing the logic of capital accumulation. They are being eliminated with tools of an economic, legal, and discursive character. They are being sidelined through the legal protection of private ownership, as well as by the obligation to pay market rents and property taxes, despite their non-profit character. Sometimes they are ostracized or criminalized for challenging the rules and logic of the capitalistic system, which further contributes to their stigmatization in the eyes of the mainstream population. The general society then tends to see them as inferior, unsuccessful, and inadaptably dropouts, and consequently regards their spatial practices with suspicion, fear, or contempt. Some spaces occupied or inhabited by unconformable countercultures are often perceived as dangerous to the existing societal order.

The rate of deviance of alternative spaces from the mainstream society varies on the basis of several factors; using the perspective illustrated in Figure 1, alternative spaces with the highest rate of deviance are the ones that are illegal and most autonomous at the same time, e.g. various political squats. On the other hand, alternative spaces that most conform to



the demands of the mainstream society - usually through gaining legal status or becoming more profit-driven - have the lowest rate of deviance. Such spaces are, for example, various art centers that started off as art squats and eventually become institutionalized and commercialized. By losing the deviating features, alternative spaces gradually lose their alternativeness and at certain point start blending with the mainstream, occasionally even becoming part of it. Figure 1 shows that the increasing rate of deviance results from a correlation between the rate of illegality and the rate of autonomy. The point where incorporation by the mainstream society meets with the legal status demarks the frontier of blending with the mainstream. The rest of this chapter will discuss in more detail the factors that determine the rate of alternative spaces' deviance: illegality, legality and semi-legality, autonomy, and incorporation into the mainstream.

**Figure 1.** The rate of deviance of alternative spaces in relation to the mainstream



Source: Author

### **2.2.3.1 Illegality**

Most alternative spaces tend to operate in various unofficial ways, some of which are outside the law. This is due to their unconventional nature, which current law often does not allow for, as well as the limited ability of their members to understand and adhere to the complexity of the legal system, mainly owing to their disadvantaged societal position. Certain alternative spaces do not adhere to the law by choice, and attempt to challenge it through their own resistance, calling attention to the socio-economic inequalities that exist among populations in their ability to satisfy their basic needs.

Contemporary society is suspicious of most unofficial and unusual uses of space, especially those that exist beyond the law are typically perceived as inappropriate and undesirable. Historically, unofficial uses of space, such as squatting or unauthorized house building, have not always been considered illegal, but with growing populations, decreasing amount of available space, and an ever more elaborate legal system that protects private ownership and terrains of capital accumulation, a number of different spontaneous uses of space have become increasingly less possible and available. Furthermore, the current project of neoliberal restructuring and its disintegration of the welfare state has resulted in curtailing some basic human rights, such as the universally recognized<sup>13</sup> right to housing and shelter. Before the onset of restructuring in the 1980s, the welfare politics of most European countries used to be generally more receptive towards certain spontaneous spatial practices; for example, squatting became institutionalized as an emergency housing solution (see p. 23-24, 27), and several European countries even gave squatters certain legal protection, especially Great Britain and the Netherlands. However, as Pruitt (2004) argues, under the conditions of the past three decades squatting and other similar practices have been increasingly challenged by skyrocketing real-estate prices, curtailing of the right to use vacant buildings, as well as by faster evictions (2004, p. 73). Quite recently, this globally spreading trend impacted even on the squatting situation in the Netherlands, where the Squatting Ban Bill<sup>14</sup>, passed in June 2010, banned squatting, damaging the Netherlands' long fame of being a tolerant hub for alternative lifestyles.

Operating in a society where private ownership and profit making are among the most preached values, practitioners of alternative spatial practices are still more frequently charged

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39463891/ns/world\\_news-europe#.TzfEscXbiRY](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39463891/ns/world_news-europe#.TzfEscXbiRY)

with trespassing, unauthorized occupation, non-adherence to various regulations, or unofficial economic activities. The rights of private owners have on the other hand become more enforceable as the ruling upper classes tend to protect their own interests more and more. Accordingly, the legal protection of squatters, protesters, attendees of free parties, or inhabitants of unofficial settlements, is either non-existing or insufficient, and usually hard to enforce.

Under the increasing burden of various constraints, alternative spaces might slowly cease to exist, but the people who need them will stay. If all alternative options of using space are curtailed, many young people, artists, and countercultures will end up living in disaccord with what they preach and without the ability to employ their creativity and ideas, or to satisfy their need for self-expression and independent activities. Socio-economically disadvantaged populations, such as young people without sufficient means, will end up living in crowded apartments or slave in multiple jobs to afford rent, or become homeless. Pushing alternative spatial practices further to the edge of the legal system, might cause huge damage to the psychology of their pursuers and lead to social unrest reinforced by people's radicalization and increased willingness to lean towards various criminal activities and survival tactics; some of which might take place in dangerous underground conditions.

### **2.2.3.2 Legality and semi-legality**

Because of the increasingly antagonistic circumstances, many illegal and informal alternative spaces try to gain a semi-legal or legal status. There are several ways of achieving such status. Semi-legality in this case means an alternative usage of space, authorized by the proprietor without establishing any legal relationship between the users and the proprietor, or other types of spatial usage that are neither legal, nor punishable. Examples of semi-legal use would be a free party authorized by the property's owner, but unauthorized by local authorities, or squatting in empty buildings with the spoken consent of the proprietor. Legality, on the other hand, requires incorporating alternative space into the legal system, which can take two main forms:

#### **Alternative spaces succumb to the existing legislation**

Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) point out that many collectives that operate various social, political, cultural or ecological centers in illegally held spaces grow "increasingly tired, frustrated and burnt out" by endless evictions and painful contests with the authorities, police,

and legal owners, as well as by repetitious destruction of their projects. The only way their projects can survive is if they give up part of their independence and start cooperating with the private and public spheres. By partially acceding to the terms demanded by the dominant society, e.g. through buying or renting private buildings, the users of alternative spaces are opting for “a tactical compromise with the property system” thanks to which they can “gain control over their own destiny and use of resources” (2006, p. 313).

Contemporarily, an increasing number of alternative projects skip the illegal initiation of their projects, and instead chose to start in a legal or semi-legal way from the very beginning. Such practice may be lengthy or end in failure due to the general reluctance of public authorities and private owners to negotiate with marginal interest groups. Successful legalization of alternative spaces may on the other hand considerably prolong their lifespans, and protect their users from violent evictions and police harassment. Nonetheless, legality brings in other challenges. Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) mention that the commitment to pay rent or mortgage epitomizes the inevitability of various compromises; legally held spaces are subject to the logics of the property system and real estate market, and their users therefore have to divert their energy and time towards many new responsibilities, such as revenue-generating activities. Consequently they have to organize public events to collect money, support their projects with their own personal income, or make profit through other activities that might be considerably detached from their original aspirations and ideals (2006). Some well-established alternative spaces with elaborate social and cultural programs might also deal with the financial issue through various grants, funding or subsidies from the government, private sponsors, NGOs, local authorities, and other sources. Fundraising might however also divert much of their attention and energy, and often at the significant cost of adapting the collectives’ activities to the requirements and preferences of those who allocate financial resources. On the other hand operating within legal frameworks might facilitate outreach to the wider society and increase the relevance of alternative activities in the eyes of the public.

### **Creation of new legislation that embraces alternative use of space**

This form of legalization is a lot more complex since it requires cooperation from the authorities, and their intervention into the existing legal system and established planning practices. Shaw (2006) brought evidence from Amsterdam, Berlin, and Melbourne, where urban authorities made steps towards protecting the traditionally elevated concentration of

alternative cultures in their cities in order to preserve the diverse urban environment and to retain their livability and attractiveness for tourism. Due to an unusual coincidence of the societal and municipal interests, local authorities acknowledged the cultural and economic assets epitomized by alternative scenes, and consequently addressed the threat of their destruction by neoliberal urban transformations through means of inclusive planning, heritage protection, and other types of urban policy practices. For example, Berlin's art squat *Tacheles*, an internationally renowned independent center for alternative culture, established in a former shopping center (built in 1907), became endangered by redevelopment at the turn of the millennium. The city saved the cultural center by placing the entire building under monument protection. A similar step was taken by the city of Melbourne, which secured the existence of the *Epsy* cultural institution by making changes to the local system of planning and heritage protection (Shaw 2006). In Amsterdam, a city known for its diverse squatters' cultures, the city council introduced a project for protecting squatters' activities from gentrification - the *Breeding Place Amsterdam* project (BPA) (Pruit 2004; Uitermark 2004; Shaw 2006). The city purchased the most threatened squats, and consequently leased them at heavily subsidized rates to their users in order to provide them with affordable housing and workspaces, and thereby keep them in the city. However, Uitermark (2004) points to the fact that such an approach towards legalizing and institutionalizing alternative spaces is also very unequal; cities tend to be highly discriminating and opportunistic in the way they select spaces worth keeping and supporting. Spaces that may contribute to the regional economy and business (e.g. art squats) can gain legal status much more easily than spaces the city does not perceive as an asset. In other words, squats seen as a potential commodity and crowd-puller get saved by the city, while other squats continue to experience evictions, violence and destruction of their projects.

### **2.2.3.3 Autonomy**

As pointed out earlier, spaces start losing their alternativeness when they become legal and subsequently overlap with the mainstream. The alternativeness of spaces can be best kept by minimizing contact with the mainstream society. Spaces whose users are openly refusing to accept the logic of the mainstream society and try to act in their own independent way are often referred to as autonomous. The definition of autonomy in this case is peculiar. In politics, autonomy refers to a group's or a country's right to independence, self-determination, self-governance, and the ability to shape its own destiny. In terms of personal freedom,

autonomy allows one to determine his or her own actions and behavior without being subject to outside control. In the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, autonomy refers to individuals' adhering to their own principles, laws and moral obligations. In a broader sense, autonomy also refers to self-management, independency, and some sort of peculiarity. Most alternative spaces, which this dissertation refers to as autonomous, are therefore spaces whose users deliberately choose to maximize their independence from the mainstream society and its socio-economic order. It also refers to spaces whose members exist in accordance with their own principles, desires, values and tastes, and often in accord with a mission to challenge the current society and bring about change to its status quo. From the perspective of Paul Chatterton, Jenny Pickerill and Stuart Hodkinson, who together are members of the *Autonomous geographies collective*, contemporary autonomous spaces are a more or less loosely connected network of various alternative spaces that embody anti-capitalist theories and practices (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006). To the *collective*, autonomy does not mean detachment from the capitalist world; capitalism constitutes the omnipresent system that our entire society is part of and one can hardly escape from it. Therefore it is possible to say that autonomy is an added value which may be a constituent of any of the above outlined categories of alternative spaces. Contemporary alternative spaces which are autonomous can take various spatial forms, but they all share the same purpose and mission of being "places of creativity and experimentation where the colonizing, dehumanizing and exploitative logic of capitalism is actively resisted by people trying to live and relate to each other as equals" (Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006, p. 201).

More than elsewhere, this type of autonomy could be found in political squats, working cooperatives, ecovillages, protest camps, communes, or spaces for alternative free culture etc. Such spaces can be found across the entire world; in both rural and urban areas, in both the global South and the global North. They exist in both peripheries and cores of the global economy. They constitute a new creative and experimental way of connecting the global with the local, in that they challenge and partially solve local problems that have deeper global foundations. Their actions and strategies resemble each other throughout the globe and are manifested through mutually inspired patterns that counter the hegemony of existing laws, social norms, and power relations of the contemporary capitalist society. At the same time, by contesting local manifestations of the global capitalistic order, autonomous geographies display local-specific features as well.

According to Chatterton and Hodkinson, the number of autonomous spaces is still

insufficient to overthrow the status quo of the existing hegemonic order, however, they also claim that fighting for autonomous spaces can play a crucial role “in both resisting global capitalism and helping us develop viable alternatives to the private profit system” (Chatterton and Hodkinson 2006, p. 201). In addition, Mikkelsen and Karpantschhof (2001) point out that these bases of resistance do not just serve as the spatial anchors of existing movements, but the right combination of space, time, and interaction can also be highly relevant in the production of action and creation of new structured political movements that rebels against free trade, and contributes to the expansion of civil society and social autonomy.

Due to this antagonistic relationship with the hegemonic order, autonomous spaces must face endless attempts of the mainstream society to conform them. For autonomous spaces, independence is crucial and therefore cannot be compromised; trade-offs with the mainstream society are potentially destructive towards their autonomy. The ability to retain an oppositional stance and create true innovative alternatives requires a certain level of detachment from mainstream society and capitalism. More secure conditions and continuity for autonomous spaces might be achieved only through a continual resistance or a lengthy lobby to have their interests enacted into national legislation. Succumbing to the legal frameworks without challenging them might come at the cost of being blended together with the mainstream and commerce, as well as the loss of autonomy, even alternativeness.

#### **2.2.3.4 Incorporated**

Cooperating within the system not only epitomizes the loss of independence, but also an intensive exposure to external influences, which can ultimately end with the alternative spaces losing the very aspects that distinguish them from other spaces. The capitalist system has the ability to co-opt alternative cultures and lifestyles for its own purposes by making them more accessible to the mainstream and thereby incorporating them into the system of capital accumulation.

In 1980s, the whole idea of using alternative spaces for economic growth was grasped by a newly emerging paradigm of postindustrial urban development and urban branding that had evolved around the notion of the “creative city”. The notion was first used by Landry (2000), who saw creativity and imagination as cures for the declining postindustrial cities. Florida (2002) later added notions of the “creative class” and the “creative economy”; the new progressive populations and industries of the “creative city”. Alternative spaces then started to be noticed for their creativity and their role in aestheticizing urban life. Research into how

alternative cultures inspire new tastes and trends in contemporary urban lifestyles was undertaken by Ley (1996), who referred to the pursuers of these new lifestyles as the so-called “new middle class” or sometimes also the “new cultural class”. This demographic group is predominantly composed of “professionals in the media, higher education, the design and caring professions”, who typically work in the non-profit sector rather than in the commercial sector. They are usually “higher in cultural capital than in economic capital” (Ley 1996, 2003 in Cameron and Coaffee 2005, p. 41). Also, according to Zukin (1998), the last generations of urban population have grown especially fond of cultural consumption. In response to this trend, cities have been simulating “the growth of both for-profit culture industries and not-for-profit cultural institutions” (1998, p. 825) in order to satisfy the multitude of tastes and demands for distinctive goods and diverse urban lifestyles, including the alternative ones. Zukin points out that while corporate chains aestheticize public space in a way that usually ends up by its standardization and private control (1995), alternative cultures have the ability to turn old and ethnically diverse neighborhoods into exciting spaces of social diversity and cultural experimentation (Zukin 2010).

Practitioners of alternative culture are contemporarily in a position that provides them with the option to exist and operate as a legitimate part of the mainstream society, and to make profit of their alternative cultural production. Such option comes at the cost of cooperating with the interests of local authorities or private sector. Once alternative spaces choose such option, many actors start pressing for the opportunity to capitalize on them, or to use them for other private interests and purposes, such as marketing, advertising, branding, gentrification, etc. At this point alternative forms start blending with the mainstream and undergo an interesting mix of processes, which are not always an outright swallowing of the alternative by mainstream, but more often a process of mutual intermingling, where both the mainstream and the alternative exchange some of their distinguishing characteristics. Alternative spaces can for example become more profit oriented and cooperate with large corporations, while the mainstream tastes start embracing new alternative forms, e.g. the taste for industrial architecture, derelict buildings, etc. For example, nowadays, it is not uncommon for big automobile companies to organize car shows in abandoned factories.

Harvey once allowed for the possibility that “the forces of culture appropriate those of capital rather than the other way round” (Harvey 2001 in Shaw 2006, p. 157). But so far exchanges between alternative forms and the mainstream predominantly take the form of the mainstream incorporating alternative aesthetics, and alternative spaces losing their



alternativeness. Even the members of alternative spaces might eventually start taking advantage of the possibility to profit from their alternative spaces and activities, and give in to their gradual transformation into the mainstream. Such mutual exchange might partly mean that mainstream society is becoming more diverse and tolerant, but first and foremost it is another symptom of the capitalist tendency to gradually encompass every last element of the society, including the forms that deviate from the mainstream, and submit the entire society to the rules driven by market logics. Due to this tendency, the decision to run alternative spaces in a legal way and in cooperation with the market can be an extremely slippery slope.

### **2.3 Citizens and the *right to the city***

The citizens of Czechia, who had experienced life behind the Iron Curtain, remember the former regime and its central planning as totalitarian, highly undemocratic and environmentally destructive. As we could learn from the preceding chapter, even traditional democratic societies are often undemocratic, unjust and oppressive, which can be well illustrated on the example of their approach towards alternative spaces and their users. Due to the current major crisis of global economy the former socialist countries are finally learning that the capitalist mode of urban production is not the long desired solution for their past problems; in fact, capitalism constitutes just another cause of new societal and environmental disruptions and disparities. Interwoven with the growing aggression of the globalizing market, some of the impacts of neoliberal ideologies on social and environmental justice, human relationships, mentality, desires and needs, as well as aesthetic values, etc., seem to be just as destructive, if not worse.

As regards the cities, one of the worst impacts of capitalism is the commodification of urban space and a growing number of aspects of urban life, which significantly affects people's right to use and inhabit contemporary cities. The following chapters will introduce one of the key theoretical concepts of this dissertation – the *right to the city*. Then I will further discuss in more detail the ways in which capitalism affects people's *right to the city* and urban space, not to say their right to alternative space, as well as the ways in which the *right to the city* is struggled for by the people.

### 2.3.1 The loss of the *right to the city*

Why is capitalism so oppressive towards alternative spaces despite the proclaimed democratic character of most traditional capitalistic countries? In fact, the seemingly democratic character and the ability to provide affluence are the key to the success of capitalism in winning a hegemonic position to dominate the majority of human societies and the production of the spaces they inhabit. The functioning of capitalism is in reality based on domination and exploitation, which Lefebvre sums up as the “exploitation of people as producers, consumers, consumers of products, consumers of space” (1996 [1967], p. 85). Lefebvre (1996 [1967]) observes that the people's well being has always succumbed to the ruling classes and their need to shape cities in a way that allows them to retain their power.

There is a significant distinction in the way cities are formed in regimes that are oppressive, and in regimes that are democratic but exploitative; while oppressive regimes create urban forms that are valuable in terms of either their aesthetic or their utility, exploitative regimes replace the creation of such forms by producing mere products of exchange value. Cities that are built for the reproduction of a capitalist society therefore no longer constitute stable centers whose main function is to encapsulate everyday human life and activities. No more can they be eternal beautiful *oeuvres* for people to admire and further cultivate. Instead, age-long centers of human life, creativity and becoming have been replaced by cities that are ephemeral and in constant motion. Contemporary cities have lost their traditional “urban life” and have become nothing but self-perpetuating machines for capitalistic production, disintegrated and dominated by infrastructures that foster nothing but people's socially constructed need of infinite consumption and accumulation.

#### 2.3.1.1 A cry for the *right to the city*: The origins of the concept

In 1968, on the occasion of 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Marx's *Capital*, and shortly before the outbreak of world-wide social resistance movements such as *Prague Spring*, *French May*, etc., Lefebvre published a highly influential book entitled *Right to the City* (Leontidou 2010). In this book, Lefebvre (1996 [1967]) criticized the disintegration and alienation of the capitalist society and culture, and the impact of these processes on the deeper “deconstruction of the city”. In his cry over the people's inability to affect urban politics, the term *right to the city* was used for the very first time. Since the series of protests events in 1968, the broader issue of human rights has received an elevated attention in both academic

discussion and public discourse. As another form of a human right, the idea of the *right to the city* consequently turned into a concept widely used in many different contexts and for various purposes. Either in the form of a motto, a slogan or an idea, the *right to the city* has gained a solid position in academic scholarship, social movements, international initiatives, and, in some cases, even in urban politics and legislation.

Lefebvre's idea of the *right to the city* became a broader symbol of the people's demand for the renegotiation of human liberties and rights in relation to their ability to actively participate in producing and using urban spaces, and, therefore, received the particularly significant attention of the scholars in geography and other urban studies related disciplines. It has gained a substantial position as theoretical basis of much research and theoretical work that engage in observing and studying the ways that the idea of the *right to the city* translates itself into the relations between urban environments, urban populations and urban politics. The theoretical conception itself, however, still requires some serious theoretical and political development. Part of the theoretical work that engages with the *right to the city*, therefore attempts to elaborate its true meaning and implications in practice (Purcell 2002, 2003; Brown 2010; Attou 2011).

Although Lefebvre's (1996 [1967]) conception of the *right to the city* was rather fluid, broad, underdeveloped, and, as many quote in Lefebvre's own words, more "*like a cry and a demand*", it was also a very complex notion that influenced a wide scope of both academic and non-academic areas. The original thought of the French Marxist sociologist therefore deserves a more detailed revision. His notion of the *right to the city* was pointing to the people's claim to a transformed and renewed "*right to urban life*" in a city that does not provide only structures for the satisfaction of consumption needs, but also enables its citizens to satisfy a multitude of their other human needs and allows them to democratically control the production of the space that they inhabit. In such a city, it is crucial to have a well-defined center which functions as a meeting place and as a place where use values outweigh the values of exchange; a center that does not exclude and marginalize less privileged members of the society. Lefebvre's conception also made reference to his concern for the loss of urban life caused by people fleeing unlivable city centers destroyed by industrialization and commercialization and their searching for "real lives" outside of the city. He believed that the need for urban life was one of natural human needs, which operates as a powerful driving force for the people's claim to re-inhabit those alienated city centers and to re-establish the former social, political and cultural functions of the centers (1996 [1967]).

### **2.3.1.2 Undermined citizenship**

Purcell (2002, 2003) has shown that the dynamics we have seen in our cities since Lefebvre first introduced the idea of the people's *right to the city*, have lead to results that are quite the opposite of an idealistic notion of a renewed, more inclusive and participatory citizenship. Instead of people gaining more control over their cities, we have increasingly become aware of democratic citizens being disenfranchised by the global process of neoliberal restructuring. According to the opponents of this type of globalization, Purcell says, the control that citizens used to hold through their representation by democratically elected governments, has gradually shifted to transnational corporations and unelected transnational organizations. These corporations and organizations are pursuing a globalization project that involves "the increasing functional integration of all people and places into a single, laissez-faire, and capitalist world economy" in which "the growing power of capital and its pursuit of neoliberalization will increasingly disenfranchise the mass of people, excluding them from the decisions that determine the course of globalization" (Purcell 2002, p. 99). Purcell calls this current form of citizenship, a "democratic-liberal/Westphalian citizenship, defined by the Westphalian geopolitical order. Under this order, the existing citizenship is undermined by a capitalist social relation and the increasing control of capital over social life and material environments. If people are to reclaim the *right to the city*, these social relations of capitalism, and thereby undermined citizenship, need to be profoundly reworked. Purcell holds an opinion that the currently undermined state of citizenship creates a great deal of space for the imagination and emergence of a new form and more promising Lefebvrian type of citizenship – a citizenship that would challenge political and economic structures underlying the status quo (2003, p. 583).

### **2.3.2 What city do we desire and who has the right to decide?**

Nonetheless, "it remains unclear what the *right to the city* entails or how it might address current problems of disenfranchisement" (Purcell 2002, p. 99). Purcell warns that in spite of general tendency to uncritically perceive rights as something positive, it is unknown what the citizens would do with their power and whether their empowerment would contribute to a more democratic city or instead a new type of political domination (2002). In order to approach a more elaborate vision of a more democratic city, further questions around the

notion of the *right to the city* must arise. Scholars frequently deal with the question of the kinds of rights that are demanded, the type of people who are demanding them, the ways these rights are or should be implemented, plus the kind of city and spatial forms that people want to achieve through implementing these rights (McCann 2002, Purcell 2002, 2003; Harvey 2008; Marcuse 2009). A city controlled through a new form of citizenship would likely be very different from the cities that currently exist; Lefebvre (1996 [1967]) himself provided two series of propositions that could challenge the current status quo of our cities and could contribute to the invention of a new, future form of a city that looks very different from the urban forms that we are currently experiencing: His first proposition suggested “a political program or urban reform not defined by the framework and the possibilities of prevailing society or subjugated to a ‘realism’, although based on the study of realities”, and thus “not limited to reformism”. The second proposition recommended “mature planning projects which consist of models and spatial forms and urban times without concern for their current feasibility or their utopian aspect” (1996 [1967], p. 155). In his pursuit of urban justice and the people’s access to the urban life, Lefebvre was advocating an unrestrained idealism and an escape from conventions, but at the same time he refused to define what these alternative spaces might actually look like. In addition, Lefebvre leaves us without defining how these utopian ideals could lead to the existence of the desired future city. Most likely, it would not happen by pursuing a set of individualized ideals. As Harvey (2008) remarks, a city to be made and remade requires a collective action moreover answering the question of the kind of a city that people really want, a question that “cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire” (2008, p. 23).

McCann (2002) suggests, that, although far from the Lefebvrian vision of the *right to the city*, random cases of progressive results can be realized through participatory urban planning, a trend that is occasionally experimented with in contemporary European and North American urban politics. Such instances may “provide opportunities for the articulation and realization of new visions of urban life” (2002, p. 78). However, the strategy of participatory urban planning brings only partial results and does not subvert the deeper mechanism of spatial production. In accordance with his criticism of neoliberal production of urban space, Harvey (2008) reminds us that one of the most crucial roles in the people’s struggle for their *right to the city* is played by the very nature of capitalist urbanization. The capitalism driven society produces cities that are increasingly more dominated by the logic of unrestrained

neoliberal market, by the venerability of private ownership and by the obsession of the right to freely accumulate capital. The *right to the city* is usurped by those with the right to capital accumulation, a privilege distributed among populations in a highly unequal manner. Those few who have accumulated the most capital into their possession would not have been able to do so without the process of urbanization, which both feeds and absorbs their wealth. Backed up by their wealth, these elites have an exclusive right to shape and reshape urban spaces that constrain the lives of people who are excluded from active participation in decision-making in urban politics and in production of urban spaces. If spaces are predominantly produced only by the elite of the capitalist society, while other members of the society have only a marginal role, these spaces tend to be designed in a way that reproduces the wealth of the elite and, at the same time, reduces the people's right to use these urban spaces for purposes beyond the purposes of consumption – purposes such as consumption of real estate, consumption of goods and services, and consumption of leisure experience and superficial tourism, etc. The space of consumption is designed in a way that pacifies people by providing them with an illusion that true freedom can be substituted by the freedom of choice. In cities where such conditions prevail, the ideal of urban identity, citizenship and belonging can barely be achieved (Harvey 2008), and the needs of those not pacified met only through resistance and subversion (Chatterton and Hollands 2003, Mitchell 2003).

### **2.3.3 The rights of the deprived and alienated**

A city that is driven by the neoliberal logic of consumerism creates an imagination that market offer is able to satisfy all the people's needs. Marcuse (2009) listed important attributes of a desired and socially just city, among which he also listed the city's ability to satisfy people's aspirations and material needs. However, he also advocated for a city where the needs of those who are deprived or alienated can be met too (2009, p. 191). Regarding the highly unequal redistribution of wealth among populations, clearly the pure act of consumerism cannot satisfy the needs of all. In fact, it is inherent to the consumer society to create the deprivation of those with lack of resources, and alienation of those who demand more than just pure consumption. By the logic of a city that only enables people to satisfy their consumption needs, the *right to the city* does not belong to those who cannot be equally involved in consumption or want to use it for other purposes. According to Lefebvre, the

citizens who are the most deprived by such logic, and whose role in reclaiming their *right to the city* is also the most important, are the working class (1996 [1967]). Marcuse, however, states that the people who are denied their *right to the city* are not only the ones on the economic margin, but also the ones on the cultural margin. Some people may have money that allows them to pay for satisfying their needs, but they may also have needs or bodily features that are in conflict with a city that prioritizes different values. These groups of people that are struggling in a capitalist city are therefore not only the working class people, the unemployed or the homeless, but are also people oppressed “along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, lifestyle” or “the alienated of any economic class”, often the “youth, artists, a significant part of intelligentsia in resistance to the dominant system as preventing adequate satisfaction of their human needs” (Marcuse 2009, p. 191). This wider variety of marginal groups of people then do not necessarily resist only the capitalist city, but also “the racist city, the patriarchal city, or the heteronormative city, all of which confront inhabitants in their daily lives” (Purcell 2002, p. 106).

### **2.3.3.1 The right to the public space - the very *right to the city***

The logic of a racist, patriarchal and heteronormative city that predominantly functions as a center of peaceful and placid consumption increasingly more interferes with the right to the public spaces. A city that competes with other cities in attracting consumers attempts to offer an environment that is safe and aesthetically pleasant for potential affluent visitors (again – Lefebvre was not very happy about the contemporary city being “*visited*” rather than “*inhabited*”), who could use local commerce and other services. The role of public spaces in such cities has been reduced to that of traffic arteries that connect different sites of consumption and is predominantly used for visiting, not for inhabiting. Individuals or groups of people that disrupt the ideal of a clean, safe and aesthetically attractive city are therefore viewed as undesirable and a potential threat. From the perspective of Mitchell (2003), the main questions that arise around the *right to the city* demands, are those who actually have the right to use public spaces in cities, how those rights are demanded, policed, legitimized and, furthermore, undermined, limited and contested. Reflecting on the frenetic rise of control over the security in the public spaces in New York after September 11, Mitchell illustrates the way practice determines the relationship between urban space, social justice and rights. In New York, the threat of terrorist attacks was abused as a pretext for transformations that would intensify control over public spaces and their protection against users seen as inappropriate.

These transformations in New York were symbolic to the new neoliberal global trend of public spaces' axing, typically comprising of a drastic rise of security cameras, fencing and enclosing of parks, playgrounds, and other public areas, increases in the number of police officers and security guards, and implementation of new security laws and regulations. Mitchell specifically points to the impacts the "anti-homeless laws" have had on the most impoverished people, for whom public space has remained the only area they can inhabit. According to Mitchell, "anti-homeless laws" undermine the very *right to the city*" (2003, p. 9). A city that uses sanitation, control and surveillance in its attempt to evoke an illusory impression of orderliness is increasingly becoming subjected to a socially unjust order and does not serve the needs of the most socially disadvantaged. Mitchell, however, also alerts to the fact that the people have in reality never been fully guaranteed the right to public space. He assumes that the only way of maintaining the right to public space and of advancing social justice is through struggle, which always is accompanied by potential violence, and where the crucial role is played by actors from the civil society. The struggle over the right to public space, and its partial guarantee and consequent enforceability through law, has always had to be won in a popular struggle and through radical activist movements (Mitchell 2003).

#### **2.3.4 Activism, urban social movements and spaces of resistance**

The idea of the inevitability of radical popular struggle over the *right to the city* has, not surprisingly, infiltrated into a substantial part of world-wide social movements concerned with urban issues, human rights, alter-globalization, and other kinds of grassroots activism. Around the world, we are now witnessing masses of urban dwellers having all kinds of rights to the city taken away – their right to secure livelihoods, affordable housing, access to drinking water and other resources, and their right to affect urban politics, production of urban forms, as well as the broader right to live in a socially and economically just society. Brown (2010) divides the "struggle against the continued erosion of rights" into two broad groups: the local social movements, which address the issues of those whose lives and livelihoods have been directly oppressed and severely affected by the process of economic globalization, austerity politics, etc., and the global social movements, which oppose the deeper causes of fundamental contradictions within our current socioeconomic set-up. As Brown shows, one of the most important results of the global dialogues concerning urban politics, citizenship and



urban activism is the creation of the “World Charter on the *Right to the City*”<sup>15</sup>, an initiative that was later adopted as a theme in the *World Social Forum*. The charter addresses a set of general problems of contemporary urbanization and their impacts on urban populations worldwide, seeking to be “an instrument oriented to strengthen urban processes, vindications, and struggles”, as well as a platform that can link all public, social and private actors in their effort towards the recognition, the establishment and also the legal enforceability of the *right to the city* as a new kind of human right. According to Brown, the international agencies have not yet taken the charter forward due to two of the charter’s main controversies: “the inclusive definition of ‘citizen’ regardless of formal residency status, and establishing the social function of property” (2010). Nonetheless, the agenda of the charter not only stems from a multitude of global and local urban social movements, but has also influenced them and contributed to the emergence of many new ones. In different locations around the world, poor people are organizing against their displacement in the interest of urban renewal, gentrification, sanitation, development, and other “class specific” interests; fighting for their right to inhabit land, properties, use resources, etc. In terms of organization and stability, these movements range from very loose and ephemeral to movements that over time have shifted into very well established ones. Movements that have been operating for several years are for example the African shack dwellers’ organization *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, or the American *Right to the City*<sup>16</sup> national movement, which is an alliance unifying American urban initiatives<sup>17</sup> with an agenda that addresses urban justice, human rights, and democracy related issues, and along with many others in different parts of the world. Numerous initiatives have been occurring especially in Latin American cities (see Souza 2001, 2006, 2009), among

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<sup>15</sup> “The ‘World Charter on the Right to the City’ ([http://docs.china-europa-forum.net/doc\\_614.pdf](http://docs.china-europa-forum.net/doc_614.pdf)) was developed by various nongovernmental organizations, national and international civil society networks, professional associations and forums in order to ‘gather the commitments and measures that must be assumed by civil society, local and national governments, members of parliament, and international organizations, so that all people may live with dignity in our cities.’ It highlights the rights that inhabitants of cities can claim, including democratic management of the city, equality and non-discrimination within the city, the social function of the city, the right to justice, freedom and integrity and the right to water, housing and employment, among others” (quoted from [www.globalgovernancewatch.org/resources/world-charter-on-the-right-to-the-city](http://www.globalgovernancewatch.org/resources/world-charter-on-the-right-to-the-city)).

<sup>16</sup> “Right to the City (RTTC) emerged in 2007 as a unified response to gentrification and a call to halt the displacement of low-income people, LGBT\*, and youths of color from their historic urban neighborhoods. We are a national alliance of racial, economic, and environmental justice organizations. Through shared principles and a common frame and theory of change, RTTC is building a national movement for urban justice, human rights, and democracy. RTTC seeks to create regional and national impacts in the fields of housing, human rights, urban land, community development, civic engagement, criminal justice, environmental justice, and more.” ([www.righttothecity.org](http://www.righttothecity.org))

\* Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people

<sup>17</sup> E.g. New York based *Picture the Homeless* [www.picturethehomeless.org](http://www.picturethehomeless.org), *Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence* [www.caaav.org](http://www.caaav.org), or *FIERCE – Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community*.

which we can list e.g. the Zapatista liberation movement in Chiapas, Mexico, Brazilian favela activism, or the Argentinian “piqueteros” – a protest technique that consists of protesters blocking a road or a street and claiming their demands. Leontidou draws our attention to the emergence of many new social movements in Southern Europe, pointing to their democratization, Europeanisation, and also to their innovativeness through historical legacies of squatting, land occupations, occupied social centers and cosmopolitan loose networks of solidarity and information (2010).

#### **2.3.4.1 Contemporary radical movement**

Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (2009) hold that all these different cases of urban social movements that have been opposing the destructive and no longer sustainable capitalist mode of urbanization nowadays seem to be validated and proven right by the ongoing recession of global economy. At the same time, they assume that alternative visions of urban life are not only constrained, but are also provoked by this challenging time in the history of capitalism. They go on to demonstrate this assumption by a list of the most recent cases of urban movements that have been occurring in various major cities, such as. London, Copenhagen, or Paris, and which have taken many different forms, both violent and nonviolent. The three authors are, however, engaging in the question as to whether these movements have any potential to create some radical systemic change, or if their demands will be accommodated within the current system without causing any serious damage to the systemic status quo (2009). Souza (2009) critically answers this question by pointing to the already existing movements in ‘global South’, where recent examples of both co-option (e.g. attempts made by Argentina’s political power couple – Cristina and Néstor Kirchner, Brazilian president Lula da Silva, etc.), as well as generating of radical practices (such as that of *Abahlali baseMjondolo*), can be found. Souza, therefore, upbraids the three authors for their lack of insight into movements outside of Europe and North America, and makes an interesting and precious simile about some of the most radical Latin American and African movements:

*“[these movements] are playing chess against capital and the state apparatus. Of course, they are far from reaching a mate position, but in spite of their several handicaps (they are ‘playing with the black pieces’) they are performing very clever moves with their pawns, knights and bishops, sometimes threatening rooks and even the queen. In fact, it is as if we were seeing several chess games being played in many different places at the same time. However, in some situations some aggressive moves have already been performed by the ‘player who plays with the white pieces’ (capital and state apparatus – in fact it is quite*

*obvious that the state is not a neutral judge in this tournament!), and the defenses performed by the 'player with the black pieces' are full of 'lessons' for all challengers" (Souza 2009, p. 489).*

### **2.3.5 Right to the alternative spaces**

In the contemporary society the economic interests of the elites are backed by weakened governments and by the neoliberal tendency to gradually jettison the welfare state and to curtail the rights of those who cannot compete with the economic forces. The number of those who fail to play by the rules of this new game and who are being forced to get out of the way of the stronger players is growing. The most vulnerable populations suffer from lack of affordable housing, high unemployment, lack of social securities, and exclusion from the consumer possibilities. Due to these circumstances an increasing number of people fail to compete in the market driven society and urgently need alternative spaces to satisfy those needs that are not satisfied within the conventional frameworks. However, these disadvantaged members of the society are being sidelined even by conventional urban development and urban politics, which use the same oppressive logic against the alternative spaces they need. The contemporary development and politics make the position of alternative spaces insecure and fluid in character, undefined by any particular time and space, and condemned to inhabit peripheral areas with limited possibility to outreach to the rest of the society. In a society that wants to remain open and democratic it is of utmost importance that oppositional ideas and practices have the ability to outreach towards the society. Only in that way they can challenge its status quo, reflect its weaknesses, and provide it with new alternatives and improvements. Alternative spaces are essential for the democracy and societies that strive to retain legitimate democracy should take steps towards reducing obstacles that make non-dominant use of space so complicated, ephemeral, uncertain, or even punishable. In the following chapters I will discuss in more detail the contemporary situation of alternative spaces in relation to the urban development, as well as their potential for creating cities which are more inclusive, democratic, just, and satisfy a wide range of needs of all members of the society.

## **2.4 Alternative spaces in the context of contemporary urban development**

In the preceding chapters I have shown that alternative spaces are both victims and opponents of contemporary processes of commodification, standardization and securitization of our cities. Most alternative spaces are products of the unjust, undemocratic and profit driven society and as such they usually face constant insecurity, transiency, and the inevitability of displacement. At the same time alternative spaces deal with the constant threat of their co-optation by the mainstream and the inherent loss of their alternativeness. In the urban environment which is constantly being reshaped by the forces of capitalism, alternativeness is condemned to transience, moving from one space to another, leaving old spaces, and emerging elsewhere. Capitalism has the ability to consolidate the status quo through slowly encompassing more and more terrains, including alternative forms.

External forces tend to pressure alternative spaces to become part of the mainstream, or to move elsewhere. The trend of expanding terrains for capital accumulation has been further accelerated during the past three decades of globalization and urban economic restructuring. This trend is highly uneven, since it focuses on areas that are attractive for development and commerce; in such areas profitable functions struggle for space and push out terrains which are convenient for alternative use and accessible to disadvantaged members of the society. On the other hand, this spatial concentration of capital is accompanied by large-scale disinvestment elsewhere, typically in areas which are not in demand and generate little or no profit. Such areas might potentially constitute a new milieu for new alternative use. In the following chapters I will discuss in more detail the current situation of alternative spaces in relation to urban development. I will especially focus on their exceptional ability to function as gentrification pioneers who can attract middle class people and investment into disinvested neighborhoods, and their role of the initiators and victims of gentrification related displacement.

### **2.4.1 Pioneering unexplored lands and initiating gentrification**

Most alternative spaces usually resist the market mechanisms or disrupt the conventional logic of capital accumulation; since many of them enable non-profit and alternative activities, they usually do not generate profit. Their users either strictly refuse it or they don't see it as

their main focus. In the face of commercial competition they rarely withstand rising property prices and pressures for “higher and better” land-use, especially in downtown areas undergoing development. In her study of urban spaces for alternative culture, Shaw (2006) noted that the low or nonexistent economic return constrains such spaces to urban areas that are not in demand by the dominant culture, for example to disinvested and de-industrialized parts of the city. Such areas are not very costly and in return “create the social space for interaction and formation of economic space for experimentation and flexibility”; Shaw therefore concluded that most alternative spaces can be found “in the interstices of the urban form: in the disinvested inner city; in the derelict buildings, deindustrialized sites, under-used docks and railway yards of advanced capitalist economies; in unregulated, unpoliced ‘no-man’s lands’ ” (Shaw 2006, p. 149).

The environments where alternative spaces tend to concentrate are highly unstable. Due to the changing global economy and fluctuating real estate market, different spaces are cyclically used and abandoned as capital investments shift from one place to another, on both local and global scales. Spaces such as former industrial zones and working-class neighborhoods affected by deindustrialization and disinvestment are usually not easy to revitalize or transform for a different use. They typically concentrate populations that suffer from unemployment and poverty. Such areas are unpopular for middle and upper classes, and risky in terms of new investment. On the other hand, they are attractive for practitioners of alternative cultures and other minorities. Cley (1979) was one of the first scholars to notice and describe the way these feared neighborhoods gradually became invaded by newcomers, mostly consisting of “design professionals or artists who have the skill, time and ability to undertake extensive rehabilitation”, or homosexual communities who “seek privacy and have the money and taste to take on this challenge” (Clay 1979 in Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, p. 31). Later on, Zukin (1982) provided an account of the way New York artists in search for affordable living and working spaces started occupying old loft-buildings in the deindustrialized working-class neighborhoods in Manhattan, especially in Soho and Lower East Side. Zukin describes how artists, alongside various alternative subcultures, which she refers to rather narrowly as “countercultures”, play an important role in de-stigmatizing unpopular and feared neighborhoods. Due to their presence, previously avoided areas gradually become attractive for newcomers and investment:

*“In a curious and unexpected way, the counterculture’s pursuit of origins – by loosening the*

*authentic self and bonding with the poor and underprivileged – opened a new beginning for urban redevelopment in the 1970s, alongside gentrification and gay and lesbian communities” (Zukin 2010, p. 16).*

According to Ley (1996), artists and other practitioners of alternative culture are often followed the members of the “new middle class” (see p. 43). They tend to live bohemian lifestyles, which are not detached from capitalism, but rather alienated from the aesthetics and tastes of the dominant, predominantly suburban middle class. Relatively poor disinvested urban areas that are inhabited and recuperated by these groups are consequently transformed into neighborhoods that are valued for their uncommon aesthetics, originality, cultural vibrancy and open and tolerant atmosphere (Ley 1996, 2003).

Cley refers to this process of neighborhood transformation by pioneering groups as the first stage of gentrification, so called *pioneer gentrification*, which signals an opportunity for future redevelopment (Clay 1979 in Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, p. 31). Vibrant cultures and life-styles clustered around the dwellings of artists and various minorities typically attract new audiences and transform the idea of urban living. As Zukin points out (1982) in *Loft Living*, before artists started occupying former working-class neighborhoods and factory districts, the possibility of such living arrangements were unthinkable for most of the middle classes.

#### **2.4.2 Using alternative cultures as a development strategy**

The role of alternative cultures in improving old neighborhoods and transforming them into places suitable for middle class residents did not go unnoticed by real estate developers. Living in redeveloped inner city neighborhoods, away from the tedious and conservative suburbs, and closer to urban entertainment and consumer possibilities, has been transformed into the ideal of urban living which the developers started to market to the mainstream customers (Zukin 1982). Due to this fact, the presence of art and alternative culture in residual urban areas significantly influences the development of the so-called “rent gap”, an indicator that defines the difference between the location’s current value and its highest potential value. A wide enough “rent gap” typically flags an opportunity for investors who can then develop the disinvested land in order to capitalize on its increased market value (see Smith 1979).

Living in downtown urban areas appeals to those individuals who fall into Ley’s “new middle class”, which overlaps with Florida’s “creative class” of economically productive

creative professionals (Florida 2002). The phenomenon of gentrifying working-class neighborhoods through art and alternative culture is particularly suitable for the purposes of neoliberal restructuring of many post-industrial cities, where the service-oriented labor market creates new pressures on land use in inner cities, including disinvested areas. Also, with the increasing concentration of highly professional white-collar jobs in downtown areas and growing unemployment of blue-collar populations affected by urban deindustrialization, the recent trend in urban policy and development has been to facilitate the return of middle classes back downtown, allowing them to replace the surplus workforce (see Deutsche and Ryan 1984).

This strategy of urban redevelopment through alternative culture has become especially popular among promoters and real estate practitioners of gentrification in big North American cities. Artists and people involved in alternative cultural production are perpetually in search of affordable working spaces, and willing to move into derelict neighborhoods to reduce the costs of their living and work space and insufficiently profitable activities. Their effectiveness in pioneering gentrification has been used by urban governments and real estate developers for the purpose of opening up new terrains for development. Particular pioneering groups are offered attractive rent concessions or other advantages in neighborhoods meant for redevelopment. Mid-class newcomers, the gentry, consequently follow the pioneers and their art. Certain neighborhoods in New York, such as East Village, or Lower East Side were one of the first ones to be redeveloped by using such tactics (Deutsche and Ryan 1984, Smith and DePhilippis 1999, Hackworth and Smith 2001, Zukin 1982).

#### **2.4.3 Who is the pioneer and who is the victim of gentrification?**

The role of art and alternative cultures in gentrification is paradoxical. Ley (1996) gives an account of the dual role they play: At first alternative cultures operate as gentrification pioneers in unexplored and untested terrains that mainstream society and investors avoid due to their riskiness and unpredictability, and through their presence make these areas acceptable for newcomers and for gentrification. Paradoxically, the same gentrification which they helped to initiate subjects them to displacement through increased real estate prices. It is generally known that gentrification causes displacement of poorer, predominantly working-class population, whose presence becomes constrained by the arrival of new social groups and

related rise of property taxes and rents (Hartman 1979, Smith and Williams 1986). The arrival of the new gentry and investment replaces most low-profit activities and low-income groups by 'higher and better' uses; some inhabitants flee due to the sudden rise of the costs, while others become subject to more violent displacement due to the redevelopment of their property or they are evicted because of their inability to pay rising rents.

Alternative cultures and their spaces eventually disappear from gentrifying neighborhoods along with the poor. However, not all alternative cultures are involved in the process of gentrification in the same way. While the more deviant spaces, such as radically political squats play relatively little role in initiating gentrification and contrariwise often fall sacrifice to it, squats that involve art production and cultural programs are more likely to attract development. The most efficient in initiating gentrification are legalized spaces that are high in cultural capital, such as art galleries, especially the non-conventional ones, aimed at young audiences. But to what extent is their involvement deliberate and active, and how does gentrification affect them?

Deutsch and Ryan provide an especially critical account on the New York art communities' involvement in the socially unjust transformation of New York's Lower East Side (1984). According to the two authors the art community cooperated with the developers in creating Art District Three in Manhattan regardless of the impacts this redevelopment had on the displacement of local populations through the expansion of galleries. Deutsche and Ryan argued that in the case of the Lower East Side artists did not accept responsibility for the injustice they had contributed to, but instead publicly voiced their concerns regarding their own unfortunate role in gentrification, in which they play both the role of agents as well as victims. Nonetheless, unlike the true victims of the gentrification in Lower East Side, artists had the freedom to choose not to move to this socially vulnerable neighborhood (1984).

### **Box 7. Art District Three**

When Art District Three was being established in Lower East Side, Manhattan already had two art districts, Uptown and Soho. According to Deutsche and Ryan artists uncritically assisted the city's aim to expand spaces for white middle class professionals and for capital accumulation. While the artist world was excited about taking over this allegedly "adventurous avant-garde setting," it almost entirely ignored the related, highly unjust removal of one of the poorest communities in New York.



Deutsche and Ryan pointed out that while art of the 1960s and 1970s had become renown for its ability to critically reflect on “the material bases of cultural production”, in the 1980s the New York artist rejected these radical art practices and instead manipulated and exploited the neighborhood, serving “as conduits for the dominant ideology that facilitates gentrification”, and unapologetically embracing commercialism and opportunism (1984, p. 105).

Ley (2003) presents us with a different practice and role of artists in public space, aesthetization, and gentrification. Ley claims that artists are not the ones to be blamed for being followed by gentrification, “it is the societal valorization of the cultural competencies of the artists that brings followers richer in economic capital”. Ley observed that many artists move across the city simply because of their pleasure and ability to “turn junk into art”, which later becomes turned into commodity by the calculating eye of someone else. In such scenario “the cultural producer has little or no control over an induced market, the movement of art works and art spaces into the domain of economic capital” (2003, p. 2542).

Finally, a great role in promoting gentrification through art is also played by public discourses. Makagon (2010) says that media often create gentrification discourses in which art, creativity and alternative cultures are seen as both initiators and victims of gentrification, but in doing so they misrepresent the whole process of gentrification and display lack of understanding of the broader political economy of urban transformation. The mainstream media often describe artistic and bohemian spaces as feeling more real and authentic than conventional public spaces that are monotonous, stereotypical and sanitized. On that account media produce a discourse that calls for the preservation of alternative spaces and the prevention of their further displacement by corporate-led urban change. However, for the most part media remain silent about the real victims and the racial, ethnical and classist context, and discriminate a broad societal group that is not involved in cultural production by creating a discourse that portrays urban frontiers inhabited by marginal populations as dirty and dangerous neighborhoods that need to be cleaned up by the arrival of white middle classes (Makagon 2010).

## **2.5 Alternative places and their potential for the cities**

Scholars are discussing to what extent alternative cultures and their spaces should be protected from displacement and evictions by external influences that try to provide them with a more secure place in our society. As a growing number of cities have embraced the concept of the “creative city” (see chapter n. 2.4.2), an increasing number of cities now realize how important cultural diversity is for urban prosperity. Creative city policies at first only prevalent in major cities are increasingly adopted in smaller towns (Cameron and Coaffee 2005). Chatterton shows that the discourses of creativity and the “creative city” that were used in an effort to “tackle social and economic decline in urban areas”, have over the last few decades gained international popularity and become the centre of urban policy debates (2000, p. 390). A true “creative city” could not do without embracing various types of alternative cultures because of their ability to create cultural climate attractive for the creative class and for tourism. A key role in promoting the social and economic potential of alternative cultures, art and creativity for the purposes of cities’ prosperity and development is played by Florida (2002), who explains that members of the creative class are attracted by creative, unique and edgy atmosphere; their appreciation and economic valorization of alternative culture and arts in particular urban areas epitomizes the arrival of economic growth, innovations and progress (2002). However, as we will see in the following chapters, the current way urban policies embrace creativity and the existence of alternative places has several downsides and needs to be rethought.

### **2.5.1 The mercantile approach towards creativity**

The views on whether or not local authorities should take advantage of the potential of alternative places are diverse. Some believe that the top-down interventions are inevitable and beneficial, while others point to their selectiveness, meritocratic approach and tendencies to co-opt or abuse alternative places. Shaw (2006) claims that various state interventions can be a viable possibility of protecting alternative places; in her opinion they can provide opportunities for a mutually beneficial cooperation without destroying alternative places’ independence or changing the nature of their culture (2006). The city’s intervention in alternative places was also explored by Pruijt (2004) in case of the Amsterdam’s BPA (see p.

40), as the last chance to save squatters' buildings in the time of their increasingly adverse survival conditions. For Prujit this legalization of squats through the BPA project was a type of "flexible institutionalization", which did not impact on the squats' alternative nature.

Uitermark (2004) on the other hand voiced concerns that the city's interventions are often followed by alternative cultures' co-optation and diluting radicalism; cities tend to help only those spaces and cultures which they see as potentially lucrative or useful for the city's goals. The different roles that various alternative cultures play in gentrification and the urban cultural economy visibly reflect the motivations, aspirations and preferences of urban governments in relation to urban culture and development. Cities privilege some alternative cultures over others, typically the more marketable and innovative ones over those that are rebellious and resist commercialization. As a result, the whole concept of "creative cities" and the way it appears in public discourses and practice is the result of injustice, discrimination, misunderstanding, and hypocrisy. Chatterton (2000) holds that most policy makers and politicians even contradict themselves when pursuing the concept of the "creative city"; they privilege the kind of creativity that entails responsibility and a sense of limits, and appeals to the majority audience, which basically implies the rejection of true creativity. According to Chatterton true creativity "challenges rather than reinforces social and economic norms and is serious about embedding radical alternatives and shifting power and resources". Authorities perceive such creativity as something unacceptable, disorderly and undemocratic. Instead, citizens are expected to share their vision for the creative city with civic leaders, while they are denied the ability to be truly creative (2000, p. 396).

Alternative cultures which are creative in a way that the city does not recognize are disadvantaged or even subject to oppression and displacement. On the other hand, Uitermark (2004) showed that cities' approach towards "rebellious" cultures can change in cases where some of the goals of the urban government become compatible with goals of a selected alternative group. Uitermark presented a case of a highly selective climate of meritocracy on the example of Amsterdam's support for certain squats, where only groups of squatters that produce art, or provide services neglected by the neoliberal government (such as cultural, integration and other social programs) are rewarded by incentives and allowed to remain in their spaces. According to Uitermark such approach disciplines privileged groups, but remains discriminatory towards groups that local authorities do not consider useful for the city's economy (2004). Meritocratic urban policy can be also illustrated on the example of urban governance in the city of Berlin, where the city put the art squat *Tacheles* (see p. 30, 40) under

monument protection due to its marketing and cultural potential, while in the meantime other Berlin's squats kept disappearing. Aware of the threat of losing its fame as a European hotspot of fringe culture, the city of Berlin is now trying to save its shrinking club scene from the effects of gentrification related displacement. *The Guardian*<sup>18</sup> informed readers that the city has set up a fund of 1 million EUR (approximately 1.34 million USD) to help the most stricken clubs find new locations and hold fundraising concerts. Such an approach is a unique example of authorities' exceptional friendliness towards securing alternative cultures a more permanent position in the city. However, it is based on meritocracy that does not reflect the wider contexts of alternative cultures. *The Guardian* quoted words of Anja Gerlich from Berlin's famous club *Schokoladen* are illustrative:

*"What is needed is a fundamental rethink of the ambitions for this city. We don't want to be an island in the middle of a town that has been thoroughly gentrified, where rents are rising, people are being squeezed out, clubs are dying"* (Anja Gerlich, *The Guardian*, 29 March 2012).

Anja Gerlich is making an important point by saying that the city of Berlin is trying to save its fringe culture without addressing the cultural and political economy of gentrification that destroys fringe culture. The fact that the city has no intention to deal with the very processes of gentrification makes the city's true aspirations quite apparent. Instead of truly embracing Berlin's alternative identity, city officials offer its illusion for tourists, who feed a large portion of the city's economy, to consume. The interventions of Berlin's local authorities can hardly be expected to save the city's fringe culture unless urban planning and development are seriously rethought and reformed. In this way the city of Berlin only tries to take advantage of particular phenomena of its environment without considering its organic interconnectedness with other urban structures.

### **2.5.2 From the cultural margins to capital accumulation**

Nowadays many cities support local cultural production as a way of healing post-industrial urban decline and spurring gentrification, in order to succeed in the interurban cultural competition. In the era of postmodern plurality that favors various styles, tastes and fashions,

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/29/berlin-nightclubs-threat-property>

alternative cultures and their places are increasingly becoming part of urban development strategies. However, the discourses which are used to justify the existence and protection of alternative cultures in the city, by for example highlighting their potentials for the city's development and economy, often display a huge misunderstanding of the very nature of alternative cultures and alternative spaces. Institutionalizing the preservation of alternative cultures typically involves the loss of their alternativeness and their absorption by the city's tourist and cultural economy.

Instead of embracing the very essence of their alternativeness, cities expose their creative spaces and cultural producers to exploitation, commercialization and co-optation by the mainstream. An illustrative example of the way cultural projects can be threatened by commercial influences is the art squat *Tacheles* in Berlin, which has more or less turned into the city's tourist attraction. Its users are increasingly driven into compromises, which include various commercial interests, and which are allowing the squat to be slowly swallowed by its capitalistic environment.<sup>19</sup>

The tendency to capitalize on all sorts of art and culture, including the alternative ones, is illustrated by Maya Roney's *Businessweek* article<sup>20</sup>, which points out the usefulness of artists for regional economies and businesses. Roney suggests that non-arts business can use artists for improving their product design, or benefit from artists' presence when trying to attract employees. She also recommends that those who want to capitalize on art should head towards one of America's ten hottest spots for art concentration<sup>21</sup> where artists can service a high number of affluent customers (Roney 2007).

According to Ley the practice of using artists as gentrification pioneers and agents of economic development and cultural valorization is the most developed in the U.S. In the American context, the economic dimension of culture has become more important than the actual cultural production, and the cultural realm is now subject to intensive economic colonization. Creativity is employed not only as a solution for urban regeneration, but for the purpose of capital accumulation (2003, p. 2542). As such, we can hardly talk about true creativity, progressiveness, or innovativeness. Instead of being used for challenging the status quo of the society, creativity is used for its uncritical perpetuation.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.exberliner.com/reviews/tacheles%3A-the-saga-continues>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/feb2007/db20070226\\_149427.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/feb2007/db20070226_149427.htm)

<sup>21</sup> [http://images.businessweek.com/ss/07/02/0226\\_artists/index\\_01.htm](http://images.businessweek.com/ss/07/02/0226_artists/index_01.htm)

### 2.5.3 The urban strategy of embracing alternative spaces' transiency

There are many reasons why spaces for alternative culture should remain insecure and impermanent; they are supported by frequent cases of commercialization and co-optation of well-established spaces of alternative culture. Shaw (2006) pointed to the opinions according to which limited lifespans, constant move and unceasing need to search for new localities are characteristics that define the essence of such spaces. They prevent them from “encroaching complacency” and gaining a steady unchanging identity by stimulating their “reinvention and the redemptive power of regeneration” (Shaw 2006, p. 154). Many authors such as Sandercock (1998), Young (1990) and bell hook (1990) see external interventions as something that will inevitably spoil the diversity and dissimilarity of these unplanned and unregulated spaces (Shaw 2006). Furthermore, cooperation with governments and mainstream culture cannot take place without curtailing the freedom, resistance, and cultural vitality of alternative spaces (2006). The idea of settling down and entering into a legal relationship with the state was also opposed by the anarchist philosopher Hakim Bay<sup>22</sup> (1991), who advocated for creating transient zones of autonomy; the so-called *Temporary Autonomous Zones* disappear before they are spoiled by external influences.

#### **Box 8. “Temporary Autonomous Zone”**

An anarchist philosopher Hakim Bay, and an advocate for an ideal utopian society, introduced the concept of the “temporary autonomous zone”, (“TAZ”), which stands for temporary alternative usage of spaces. Such usage must be completely free, non-hierarchical, disrupt official culture, and break away from authoritarian control, but also remain inherently transient. Searching for permanency is not part of “TAZ” as it requires the imposition of a structured system and diverts attention from true revolutionary activities. Examples of “TAZ” are illegal parties and festivals, or different kinds of reunions and social events of marginal and oppositional groups (1991). The idea of “TAZ” later inspired many initiatives, including the *Temporary Autonomous Art Events and Exhibitions* (TAA) (see Box 5.).

Unfortunately, transiency does not ensure the protection of alternative spaces. Although transience allows alternative cultures to evade commercial exploitation and cooptation, transiency itself can be subject to outright commercial exploitation. As we have seen, the constant search by alternative cultures for affordable spaces has been abused and manipulated

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<sup>22</sup> Hakim Bey's real name is Peter Lamborn Wilson.

many times for the purposes of development and capital accumulation. Urban governments and developers in New York commonly use artists for the purposes of gentrification exactly for this reason; they attract them by rent concessions and other benefits to use them as pioneers for future redevelopment in working-class areas. When artists stop being able to afford rising property prices in the gentrifying neighborhood, developers count on their flexibility and offer them new decently-priced venues in a different neighborhood which is intent for redevelopment. In this way artists are like puppets in hands of developers and political authorities who have learned to take advantage of their tolerance for temporary and insecure conditions, and shift them across the city in perpetual cycles of redevelopment.

The research group *Urban Catalyst* (see Box 3.) came up with another idea of embracing the fact that alternative cultures tend to be temporary. According to the research group, current urban planning is too rigid and does not allow for the possibility of utilizing various underused spaces and residual areas. These in-between locations are often used by different alternative cultures, which temporarily use them during the so-called “time-gap” – a period defined as “a moment of standstill between the collapse of a previous use and the beginning of new commercial development” (Franck and Stevens 2006, p. 273). According to the researchers, cities should introduce a policy which allows for such provisional use as prevention from the area’s or buildings’ further decay (Urban Catalyst 2004).

The strategy suggested by *Urban Catalyst*, although partial, may be a relatively viable solution to some of the downsides associated with “third-wave gentrification”. Hackworth and Smith (2001) describe third wave gentrification as extensive gentrification backed by large capital investment that enables development actors to speculate on entire neighborhoods, which might during financially unfavorable times remain hollow and underused (Hackworth and Smith 2001, p. 474). To some capacity, temporary use could be a solution for keeping vast empty areas planned for future redevelopment provisionally used and occupied until the situation on real estate market becomes more favorable. This strategy therefore favors both development and public interest. In Berlin Urban Catalyst has already initiated various projects aimed at improving the use of available residual space, e.g. by proposing the creation of a database of available residual spaces and temporary users which would allow their better mutual coordination.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.urbancatalyst.net/projekte.php?lang=en>

#### 2.5.4 Unconditioned support for alternative spaces

In the preceding chapters I have reviewed a multitude of approaches towards alternative cultures and their spaces; some of these approaches embrace the ephemeral and temporary character of alternative spaces for the purpose of exploiting it in the interest of development, while others struggle for the protection of their permanent existence in the interests of urban competitiveness and touristic attractiveness. Most of these strategies are only partial solutions as they require the users of alternative spaces to assist in the reproduction of the existing urban policy regimes, and to succumb to the cycles of development founded on the processes of creative destruction<sup>24</sup>, as well as to the general status quo of the contemporary society based on inequality and greed. Accepting such trade-offs therefore means accepting the marginalized and inferior position of alternative spaces and their users.

We also need to figure out whether alternative spaces profit more from transience and insecurity, or from a permanent and secure position. In fact, there is no outright answer to this question. Even Hakim Bay (1994), the author of the idea of “temporary autonomous zones”, eventually introduced the concept of “permanent autonomous zones” (“PAZ”), acknowledging that many “TAZ” are, or intend to be, more-or-less permanent, especially those for alternative social reproduction (such as spaces for communal living or alternative economies, repeated festivals that epitomize the “TAZ” concept etc.), whose synergy could eventually lead to Bay’s much desired utopia:

*“But the ‘perfect case scenario’ involves a free space that extends into free time. The essence of the PAZ must be the long-drawn-out intensification of the joys - and risks - of the TAZ. And the intensification of the PAZ will be....Utopia Now” (Bay, 1994).*<sup>25</sup>

Even though permanence might be desired by many users of alternative spaces, it should not be an outcome that is forced upon all alternative spaces. First and foremost, instead of predetermining their destiny, alternative spaces should have an opportunity to exist in accordance with what they preach and without being conditioned and co-opted by external demands or by the very forces they are trying to resist in the first place. Only then can they remain truly alternative in relation to the society, and provide much needed alternative spaces

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<sup>24</sup> Creative destruction is a process that Marx described as a cycle of capitalistic accumulation and consequent annihilation. Harvey describes this process as a cycle of spatial fixing capital surpluses in the form of built environment, and consequent devaluation and destruction of previous investments (1982, 2001, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> [http://dreamtimevillage.org/articles/permanent\\_taz.html](http://dreamtimevillage.org/articles/permanent_taz.html)



for disadvantaged and alienated members to live in. Through their existence alternative cultures and their spaces work on mainstream society, by showing it new modes of thinking and functioning, new paradigms of human existence, and new alternatives. Achieving such goal will then mainly depend on the users of alternative spaces themselves, as well as on their ability to retain their truly alternative and oppositional stance. It is crucial that they remain determined to resist external influences and create powerful social networks around their spaces. In relation to alternative spaces urban governments and economic actors should be neither antagonistic, nor paternalistic; instead, they should be their partners who acknowledge the fact that non-profit culture and grassroots activities are essential for urban space and must be supported in an unconditioned way.

### **3. Methodological frameworks**

#### **3.1 Research methods**

Methods used in my dissertation research are adapted to the research topic, the alternative spaces in Prague, which is a new, unexplored and understudied topic in the Czech context, and so far ignored by local academia, municipal politics, and by official statistics. Due to this fact, I selected methods that are suitable for research of an exploratory type, where hard data is not available or insufficient. The empirical data was therefore collected through qualitative research methods, and my fieldwork and data collection were mainly inspired by the approaches used in ethnography, and which have inspired many geography researches over the past two decades. The entire research was conducted from the perspective of an insider and included longitudinal participant observations, field surveys, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, and questionnaires. Part of the data was also collected by monitoring and analyzing various documents and media coverage related to political decision-making, urban development, and the cultural politics of the city. All the different aspects of how my research was conducted will be discussed in the following chapters.

##### **3.1.1 Ethnography**

Ethnography is a research method widely used in social and cultural anthropology. It is mainly suitable for researching cultures that differ from the dominant cultures. Its holistic and exploratory approach is particularly useful for tackling a particular phenomenon that so far has not been studied, which in the case of this dissertation is the local context of a specific spatial form and its social aspects. Ethnographic research is conventionally used mainly for understanding and interpreting the social behavior of various social groups. A special ethnographic approach for studying various urban cultures was developed by the ethnographers of the Chicago School; in the 1920s they were the first researchers to explore various socially disadvantaged urban populations through multiple methods – the so called *triangulation* – employed in local studies (Deegan 2001). Ethnographic fieldwork consists of

a combination of tools, which include participant observation, personal interactions with the study subjects, interviews, field notes, collecting primary documents, discursive analysis, comparative case studies, etc. These methodologies have also recently become more popular in other scientific disciplines, e.g. in political science for studying political organizations or public administration (Tulmets and Střítecký 2008).

Human geography occasionally also uses ethnographic fieldwork, although according to Herbert (2000) the method is still rather underused despite its potential profound contribution to human geography:

*“No other methodology enables a researcher to explore the complex connections that social groups establish with one another and with the places they inhabit, cultivate, promote, defend, dominate and love. If sociality and spatiality are intertwined, and if the exploration of this connection is a goal of geography, then more ethnography is necessary”* (Herbert 2000, p. 564).

Herbert claims that geographers tend to avoid ethnography due to its alleged lack of scientificity, its limited ability to generalize, and its failure “to consider its inherent representational practices”. This can be fixed by ethnographers’ acknowledgement of the pitfalls of the methodology, as well as by considering both the micro and the macro levels of the studied topic:

*“To draw connections between macro and micro requires both theoretical sophistication and empathic observation. It further requires the ability to develop a vibrant, recursive conversation between theory and data. But the benefits merit the challenge. A geography that seeks better understandings of how social structures and human agents are stirred and separated in everyday spatial contexts must embrace more, and more rigorous, ethnography”* (Herbert 2000, p. 564).

According to Katz (1994), there are still legacies of the former dominance of positivism pressuring the use of ethnography and other qualitative approaches in geography “to conform to standards that are external to their constitution”, but thanks to the current rise of nonpositivist paradigms these pressures have eased (1994, p. 69).

### **Defining the “field”**

In my research, I used ethnographic fieldwork as an observational technique which helped me to understand the reasons and meanings behind people’s tendency to occupy alternative spaces, to see the way in which these spaces are created, used and fought for, as well as ways

in which these spaces interact with the rest of the society and its culture. Katz (1994) suggests that one of the main challenges of ethnographic fieldwork is the definition of the field - the site of enquiry, which has to be artificially separated from space and time by the researcher him/herself. Katz advocates an engaged multilocal ethnographic research in which at least two sites, which might look very different from each other on the surface, are researched in order to avoid generalizing on the basis of one case study, and to reveal more than just the specificities of one local phenomenon; some deeper systemic patterns, e.g. the effects of global economic restructuring (1994, p. 68).

In my dissertation, I selected several case studies, which are different from each other, but also share some common attributes. They are all spaces in Prague that somehow disrupt the capitalistic relations within urban space and at the same time allow for alternative culture and experimentation, or resistance. I chose these spaces for several reasons: a) I know them very well and I am one of their users; b) they are subject to oppression by dominant powers in the society; c) the society needs to recognize their importance and support them. By putting the findings of my ethnographic research into relation with social structures on a global, national and municipal level, as well as with the findings of similar researches undertaken abroad, I can interpret how both the global and local economy, urban development, and politics impact on the existence of alternative spaces and alternative spatial practices in Prague.

### **3.1.2 Insider research**

Alternative spaces are predominantly occupied and used by various youth cultures. A lot of investigations of youth cultures, including the alternative ones, are often conducted by researchers who are part of the researched group itself, and therefore use the method of the so-called *insider research* (Hodkinson 2005). Since I have been a long-time member of Prague's alternative scene and a regular user of various alternative spaces in the city, I consider myself an *insider*. Hodkinson says that being an *insider* might significantly simplify the researcher's access to various exclusive groups and improve the quality of the data collecting; on the other hand, there is a risk that *insiders* may not be sufficiently critical of their group's frame of reference, and may over-estimate their initial insight. Hodkinson therefore suggests that in order to make social proximity of the researcher beneficial, rather than problematic, the

*insider researcher* should employ an approach that is reflexive and reactive to the researcher's position. In my case, the risks described above were partially eliminated by the fact that my research was not of an anthropological or culturological nature; the main subject of my focus was not the subtle details related to the identity, psychology, ideology, rituals and other subjectivities of any particular social group, individuals or collectives. Regarding the users of alternative spaces, I was mainly interested in the ways in which various users of alternative spaces enforce their *right to the city* and in which ways their attitudes related to their societal position. For the most part, I was focusing on the objectivity of the physical settings and the socio-economic position of the spaces, which predominantly young and alternative people use for their activities and entertainment, relating them to various social structures.

The interpretation of my research data was not influenced by my personal involvement in Prague's alternative scene; however, it is influenced by the selection of spaces which I decided to regard as alternative, since my definition of an alternative space certainly reflects my normative approach, based on the Marxist conceptualization of capitalism and the capitalist production of urban space, discussed in chapter 2.1. The analysis of the way economics and politics predetermine the creation, existence, and destruction of alternative spaces, as well as their socio-economic position, is inspired by structuralism. However, my critique of the politics emphasizes that the preference for profit comes at the cost of rising inequalities in the society, decreasing sustainability of the cities' livability, and crumbling democracy.

Being an insider was beneficial to my research mainly in terms of the opportunity it offered to discover the way alternative spaces and their users operate on daily basis; who is involved in their management, who uses them, who visits them, and who ignores them or opposes them? What activities take place in these spaces, what challenges do these spaces face, and how do their users deal with them? I was able to witness the struggle these spaces had to lead with actors of commerce, politics, and the mainstream public. Thanks to being an insider, I always had up-to-date information from media when they were reporting about alternative spaces and the practitioners of alternative cultures, and I was able to continually monitor the discourses media were using when reporting about particular phenomena. I also had the opportunity to personally witness both the positive and the negative impacts of alternative spaces on their surroundings.

### **3.1.3 Experience from abroad**

My life-long observations, as well as my theoretical knowledge about the area of interest, are also enriched by my rich experience from observing and using alternative spaces and attending alternative cultural events abroad, especially in Central and Western Europe, as well as North America. In London, UK, I temporarily became a squatter myself, sharing a huge residential building with a collective of twenty, and attending various cultural events in other squats in the city. I also had a summer job in Camden Town, one of the world's most vibrant melting pots for various alternative subcultures. During my Erasmus semester in Marseille, France, I became involved in the local alternative scene as a vocalist. Through out the years, I attended various *teknivals* (*freetekno* festivals) in both Czechia and several other countries. During my several trips to Canada, I traced the local punk and *freetekno* scenes, discovering gay villages and the vibrant subcultural life of big Canadian cities. With regards to the US, in New York I was able to eyewitness the way art and youth cultures get used for gentrification purposes, and in Detroit, I saw how alternative cultures slowly emerge in places abandoned by capital. As a visiting PhD scholar in Worcester, Massachusetts, I had an opportunity to live in a collective house and to discover the whole local movement of collective housing and lifestyle, as well as to experience the global wave of the *Occupy* movement (see chapter n. 2.2.2.2). My short stay at the University of Maribor in Slovenia gave me an opportunity to experience Slovenian alternative centers, such as *Pekarna* and *Metelkova*, and compare the tolerant attitude of the Slovenian authorities towards these centers with the intolerance that prevails in Prague. Finally, a lot of my experience comes from being a member of the art collective Guma Guar, with whom I have had several opportunities to perform in various alternative spaces, including some in Germany, Switzerland and Sweden.

My experience from abroad is neither analyzed nor interpreted in the empirical part of my dissertation research; however, it significantly contributed to my understanding of the area of interest and its connection to urban development, urban politics etc. It also contributed to my ability to evaluate the situation, threats and opportunities alternative spaces face in Prague.

### **3.1.4 Longitudinal participant observation and field survey**

As a researcher, I first started to be interested in alternative spaces in Prague in 2005 during

the conduct of my diploma research, which focused on the geographies of punks and skinheads (Pixová 2007a, 2007b) and later on within my dissertation research, which started in 2008. However, the period during which I was involved in observing alternative spaces in Prague exceeds the period of my doctoral studies. I started discovering and participating in Prague's alternative scene in 2001 when I first moved into the city. In the case of some alternative projects, I was able to observe how they were recuperating and expanding over a period of several years, sometimes practically from the very start of their existence (as is the case with *Cross Club*, which I first visited in 2003 shortly after its opening, observing it over a period of nine years, and *Třafačka*, which I observed for a period of six years from its opening in 2006). It was particularly interesting to follow the dynamic destinies of Prague's remaining squatters, who spent almost a decade in the famous squat called *Milada*. In 2009, during the conduct of my dissertation research, the squatters were evicted from *Milada* and consequently had to relocate several more times, each time becoming involved in various situations that are symptomatic of Prague's urban development and the local authorities' disapproval of cultures that deviate from the societal standards. During the proper conduct of my research, I visited all the spaces for which I provided individual case studies in this dissertation. Some spaces were visited only once, but most of them were visited multiple times. Investigations focused on the physical condition, spatial arrangement, and accessibility, as well as on their surroundings in terms of ongoing development, prevailing function, and interactions with the alternative space.

### **3.1.5 Interviews**

Most of the data in the empirical part of my research is based on interviews conducted with actors involved in the sphere of alternative spaces this dissertation is dealing with. Semi-structured interviews, which lasted from 30 minutes to two hours, were conducted with activists, volunteers, artists, musicians, squatters, creative professionals, architects, politicians, club managers, and directors. Six respondents answered my questions via email. Open questions were focused on particular alternative spaces which the respondents were involved in; the aim was to obtain information about the history and physical condition of each space, the process of establishing the alternative project, the users and people involved in the project, the users' relations with the local authorities and with the provider of the space,

the ways in which the project was financed, and the project's main purpose. I also asked about the challenges users of alternative spaces had to face, and in what way they were dealing with them. Respondents were also asked to suggest changes which might improve the current situation.

Apart from the users of alternative spaces, I also interviewed three district councilors, asking them about practices of the local authorities in relation to alternative cultural projects, in particular to spaces researched in this dissertation which fell under their jurisdiction. One of my interviewees was also a specialist of the housing and real estate market in Prague.

**Table 3.** Information about the interviewed users of alternative spaces

Alternative spaces	Name of respondent	Respondents' profession / relation to alternative spaces
<i>Třafačka</i>	Blanka Čermáková	Curator, production, fundraising
	Jan Kaláb	Artists with workspaces in <i>Třafačka</i>
	Jakub Nepraš	
	Aleš Zemene	
	Saša Dlouhý	Director of the documentary about <i>Třafačka</i> ( <i>Třafačka: Temple of Freedom</i> )
<i>Hala C</i>	Omri Goz	Members of the civil organization <i>Kultura Jinak</i> , organization of cultural events in <i>Hala C</i>
	Linda Šilingerová	
<i>Karlín Studios</i>	Alberto di Stefano	Italian architect restaurateur, philanthropist, member of the civil organization <i>Karlín Studios</i>
	Ondřej Stupal	Management, fundraising
<i>Hala Thámova</i>	Jovanka Vlčková	<i>Code Mode</i> project coordinator
<i>MeetFactory</i>	Jindra Zemanová	Director of <i>MeetFactory</i> at the time of the research
	Petr Krůša	Actor and artist
	Jan Horák	Theatre dramaturgist
<i>Parukářka</i> & <i>Bunkr</i>	Vladimír Gregůrek	Owner of the <i>Parukářka</i> pub.
	Jarda Švec "Umělec"	Dramaturgist, performer and a barfly
	Michal Váňa	Chairman of the civil organization <i>Parukářka</i>
<i>Klubovna</i>	Jan Špinka	Organization of cultural events in <i>Klubovna</i>
<i>Cross Club</i>	Tomáš Kenzo Zdeněk	Production
<i>Bubenská</i>	Šárka Thérová	Leasing coordinator ( <i>Orco</i> )
<i>Milada, Truhla, DIS Centrum, Zlý Čin, Cibulka</i>	Lenka Kužvartová, several anonymous interviewees	Squatters, anarchists

Source: Author



**Table 4.** Information about other interviewed respondents

Area of interest	Name of respondent	Respondent's profession / relation to alternative spaces
Cultural division in Prague 8.	Petr Bambas	Councilor in Prague 8
Monitoring housing situation and real estate market in Prague.	Jiří Pácal	The director of <i>Central Europe Holding</i>
Prague 6, <i>Klubovna</i>	Martin Skalský	Councilor in Prague 6, activist
Prague 3, <i>Parukářka</i>	Matěj Stropnický	Councilor in Prague 3, activist
<i>Truhla</i>	Milan Smrž	Tenant in the house in Truhlářská Street occupied by squatters
Site specific theatre	Denisa Václavová	Member of civil organization <i>Čtyři dny</i>

Source: Author

### 3.1.6 Monitoring and analyzing documents and media coverage

During my research, I attempted to collect as much written material about particular alternative spaces as possible. Most information was available on-line in the form of web sites run by each alternative space, or articles written by both journalists and people involved in alternative spaces, as well as some flyers. Some alternative spaces also appeared on TV in the form of documentaries, predominantly the art centers, or on the TV news, especially in case of the squatters. In several cases, I was allowed to see the contracts of lease users of particular alternative spaces made with the provider of their property, the grant proposals, or projects submitted at municipal selection procedures. I was also trying to find out more about how the Municipality and the Ministry of Culture, as well as particular city districts, finance culture in the areas of their jurisdiction. Unfortunately, not all city districts have this information available. This finding was proven also by Petr Kotouš within his presentation at the activist initiative *Street For Art* (2012); to put it briefly, the system of financing culture with public money is very confusing and non-transparent and the subsidies from the state budget basically changes frequently and lacks any firm conception. Due to this fact, I abandoned the analysis of documents and decided to discover the main downsides of the current system from the perspective of the users of the alternative spaces themselves. I also analyzed Prague's Strategic Plan and the Conception of Cultural Politics in order to compare the written declarations with the reality.

## **4. Alternative spaces in a changing political-economic context**

### **4.1 Prague: the neoliberal post-socialist city**

In order to understand alternative spaces in Prague, it is important to introduce the broader context of the city they are located in. Prague is a unique city with more than one thousand years of exceptionally rich and turbulent history which has equipped the city with particularly valuable historical and cultural heritage, as well as with a citizenry of an inimitable mentality constituted by peculiar values, tastes and desires. In terms of the adoption of Western style capitalism, Prague was particularly advantaged by its advanced pre-World War 2 capitalist past, as well as by its position in the heart of Europe and its immediate proximity of western economies, and its prime position within the urban and economic hierarchy of the Czech state. Also, unlike many other post-socialist cities, the urban fabric of Prague bears the legacies of the pre-socialist industrial era; the historical core of the city is surrounded by neighborhoods out of which many used to serve industrial production until the political change in 1989.

In many ways the contexts described above have contributed to an extremely fast re-adoption of market economy after their four-decade long interruption by socialism. As Sýkora writes, former centrally planned economies entered capitalism at the time of its global transformation in terms of the reintroduction of economic liberalism and restructuring towards a new globalized system of accumulation (1994). This neoliberal ideology and its policies exposed developed capitalistic countries to far-reaching implications and through fundamental transformation of markets and modes of production impacted on their wider socio-economic geographies. Sýkora observed that in post-socialist Czechia this new ideology was applied “in a more radical way than in the most countries of origin” (1994, p. 1164), and the economic transition was characterized by a markedly rapid “installation of all the basic features of contemporary capitalism” (1994, p. 1163). At the same time, in the context of the general euphoria of the newly democratized society, very few political arrangements were made to address issues of social regulation and to secure social peace. This insufficiency later proved to be very problematic and resulted in the growth of social inequalities, gradual dismantling of the welfare state and a general crisis of the democratic system itself.

Another significant change that the transformation to liberal capitalist democracy

introduced to Prague constituted of new patterns in shaping Prague's urban environment. Despite the expectations that urban planning has finally extricated from totalitarian central planning, the new exclusive right to reshape the geographies of the city were now claimed by capitalism and its logic of post-industrial accumulation via built environments and processes of urbanization. Prague as a major Czech city experienced a huge influx of investment capital which quickly took on a form of commercial real estate re/development, suburban expansion, as well as inherent demolition and abandonment of older urban forms, such as industrial brownfields or peripheral housing estates. This sudden political and economical change resulted in an urbanization shift which benefited a wide range of social groups; however, at the cost of impoverishing and socially marginalizing other parts of the society. Especially elder people or Roma communities became affected by displacement and socioeconomic exclusion (Bancroft 1999, Sýkora 2010).

Another specific feature of Prague is the character of its institutional reforms and transformations of social practices, which is often path dependent and carries various traces of socialist legacies (Sýkora and Bouzarovski 2012). As a result Prague has become a juxtaposition of political efforts to adapt the inherited socialist landscape to a general notion of a super-modern capitalistic city, as well as to retain certain undemocratic decision-making practices that have been inherited from the previous regimes and which allowed the politics on the municipal level to entrench a significant level of corruption. Horak (2007) brings an evidence of the way democracy on the municipal level got affected by local authorities attempting to create safe terrains for their personal gain by avoiding systemic public input into the decision making practices (2007). The corrupt environment of the transforming society affected Prague's urban development not only by potentiating the leading role of markets, but also by entrenching various unclean practices, profiteering, financial frauds, poor taste, and an abundance of wrong decisions. Under the pressure of investors and developers assisted by bribable politicians, Prague has undergone unfettered urban restructuring that has affected the city from the center through the periphery and suburbia, characterized mainly by massive commercialization, housing and office construction, revitalization of older houses, former industrial buildings, brownfields etc. These changes have affected a significant part of the city's population. The socio-spatial disparities have been so far relatively insignificant and rather local due to the socialist legacies of relatively little status differences among city districts, however, Sýkora and Bouzarovski (2012) warn that in the course of time the socio-spatial disparities will keep growing.

This dissertation project aims to tackle the problem of the creation of these new socio-spatial disparities on the example of alternative spaces, the spaces which constitute the outcome, as well as solution of socio-spatial disparities, and where the prevailing social and cultural capital are in direct conflict with the surrounding urbanization backed by strong economic actors and corrupt politics.

## **4.2 Changing context of “otherness”**

Opposition, marginality, deviance, alternativeness, or simply “otherness”, are inherent phenomena of every society dominated by one main culture. “Otherness” is the result of a certain rate of deviation from the mainstream cultural conventions, as well as from the social and normative context of their surroundings. The social and normative context of the surroundings change with changing political-economic contexts: “otherness” therefore means something else in every political regime. As a post-socialist city, Prague has experienced two types of “otherness” – the one under totalitarian socialist rule, defined mainly politically, and the one under capitalism, defined economically:

- Political “otherness” constitutes an alternative to the hegemonic ideology. Totalitarian regimes regard such alternatives as manifestations of a lack of ideological integrity which need to be eradicated, or “normalized”.
- Economic “otherness” constitutes an alternative to the economy based on profit and capital accumulation. Those who stand outside of such economy are treated on the basis of their potential to become part of it. The ones that can be commodified are appropriated for the needs of the mainstream, while the ones that resist commodification are further marginalized.

The main shift in the definition of “otherness” in Prague took place on November 17, 1989, when the totalitarian regime was overthrown and replaced by a regime driven by market forces. After more than forty years of central planning, shortage economy and totalitarian socialism, the society underwent an extensive transformation towards a democratic society and a free market.

Prague’s alternative spaces have evolved and existed in three different contexts; not

only in the two distinctively different regimes, but also in the context of the period of transformations that took place during the country's transition from one regime to another. In each context the definition and spatial characteristics of alternative spaces were different. We will now discuss in more detail these distinct contexts in Prague's history, and the way these periods shaped and defined alternative spaces in Prague:

### **Totalitarian state**

Alternative spaces were spaces that deviated from the dominant ideology of the Czechoslovak socialistic regime mainly in terms of the activities which were held in them. Under socialistic rule most property belonged to the state, or to various cooperatives, unions etc. and due to strict supervision of the state, officials were not allowed to host cultures and civil society unfitting the official culture promoted by the Communist party. Activities and cultural productions, which the regime considered subversive and inappropriate for building the socialistic society, were often suspected of being inspired or sponsored by Western imperialist enemies. The regime made these cultural activities illegal, leaving people to pursue them in unofficial ways and in well-hidden places that served as refuges for people to enjoy these forbidden activities. Dwellings or weekend houses that were allowed to be individually owned often saw some of the most alternative, oppositional and dissenting activities pursued during this period. A few selected pubs and cultural centers were popular with various oppositional groups.

### **The period of transition**

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the totalitarian socialism transformed into democratic rule, and centrally planned economy into free market. The first decade was defined by a multitude of uncoordinated processes of societal transformation, accompanied by impetuous urban restructuring consisting of property restitutions, privatizations, rent-deregulations, and spontaneous development on unused land. State-owned property was restituted or came under municipal ownership. The 1990s was defined by omnipresent enthusiasm from the newly gained liberation and the onset of democratic rule. Politicians were dealing with institutional reform and new legislation, and most of the alternative cultures became depoliticized. In the meantime people openly experimented with various new activities and cultural production, out of which many had been previously restricted or prohibited. An awakening civil society became a legitimate constituent of urban life and its spontaneous activities temporarily

enjoyed a relatively high tolerance from the authorities. The general feeling of freedom, excitement, along with optimistic expectations, also resulted in the emergence of many new spaces of alternative culture and activities, and alternative spatial practices.

### **Neoliberal state**

After the turn of the millennium, most institutional reforms had already been completed and a new social order had come to force. However, Prague was still a city in transition, continually transforming from a post-socialist city to a standard capitalist city of Western type. The number of available spaces or disinvested and underused land in the city was diminishing, as were the spaces for culture and activities that slowly started to be replaced by more profitable functions in the city. Market forces backed by the new legislative increasingly influenced the shaping of the spatial distribution of functions and activities in the city. Many previously alternative spaces in the city center gradually closed down or became commercialized. Cultural production in the city started to be restricted by new regulations, generally working to protect private owners and private ownership. Spontaneous unofficial activities were slowly disappearing from the urban space, replaced by more profit-driven activities and functions.

## **4.3 Alternative spaces in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic**

As Sýkora (2009) points out in his characterization of a socialist city, the built environment, land use, and residential differentiation under socialism were different than the ones in capitalist cities. The historical core of Prague used to be surrounded by zones which were both residential and heavily industrialized, and the periphery of the city was surrounded by newly built high-density residential areas of multistory apartment buildings. In an attempt by the state socialism to create a socially just society where the satisfaction of basic needs was guaranteed, the means of production belonged to the nation. Nonetheless, generally, members of the communist party had easier access to various resources, while the political opposition, including alternative spaces, was deprived of them.

I will now outline some of the basic characteristics of the alternative spaces under socialism in terms of the activities which were held in them, and in terms of the way they were regulated in space and time. After that I will talk in more detail about specific alternative

spaces in socialist Prague, and their users:

#### **4.3.1 Alternative activities under socialism**

In former Czechoslovakia, the totalitarian regime tried to repress, constrain and combat all activities that it regarded as a potential threat to the socialist system<sup>26</sup>. In *Islands of Liberty*, Vaněk (2002) says that socialist oppositional movements could take the form of ordinary hobbies or cultural and social activities, which democratic regimes normally consider to be apolitical. Vaněk points out that various platforms for unofficial activities were born whilst the regime's was crumbling in 1980s, mainly thanks to a new young generation unaffected by the Soviet invasion of 1968. These platforms then contributed to the youth's self-identification and to the development of a new civil society (Vaněk 2002, p. 7-9). Nonetheless, referring to spaces where oppositional activities were held as alternative can be tricky when a regime disapproves of anything that does not succumb to its ideology, including activities that conventional democratic societies consider normal. Activities disapproved of by the regime were numerous and varied, but due to the width and the scope of these activities I will now focus only on the activities pursued by the Czechoslovak version of subcultures and countercultures, which simultaneously also existing in the West, and retained their alternativeness even in post-socialism. Activities of these groups ranged from simple socializing, to their alternative cultural production and activities, and even their political dissent.

#### **4.3.2 Spatiotemporal regulations of alternative spaces under socialism**

Spatial distribution of functions under socialism was centrally planned. No functions, including the alternative spaces, were spatially distributed by market mechanisms. However, as Sýkora notes, the redistribution of functions and resources was subject to the priorities of the communist party, and therefore resulted in a specific type of socialistic inequalities (2009).

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<sup>26</sup> Platforms for popular music, sport, tourism, peace movement, or clubs for young ecologists, Christians, and scouts, all used to fall under suspicion of the leading power, and used to be subject to an increased control by security organs.





into building their socialistic society. It was not desirable to spend nights out drinking, partying, or pursuing other dissenting activities. Pubs, clubs, and other venues for the night-time economy were few, and the closing-time of most of them was at 10 p.m. Citizens' activities after 10 p.m. were subject to strict control of the Police, at that time called *Veřejná bezpečnost* (Public Security).

#### **4.3.3 Alternative spaces under socialism and their users, the so called *loose youth***

During the former regime, most alternative spaces were created and used predominantly by young people, labeled by the State Security as *volná mládež* (*loose youth*). These young people were defined by preferences in music, lifestyle, clothing, politics, and cultural production that the regime considered inappropriate and threatening to the socialistic society. Due to this fact, spaces which these young people used as a refuge for their meetings were bound to operate as centers of political resistance, and sometimes even outright opposition. Czech *loose youth* that evolved around specific music subcultures inspired by Western youth movements could be divided into two groups:

- 1) The hairy people, active mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, out of which many were members of the Czech underground culture.
- 2) The punk subculture, which dominated the Czech alternative scene in 1980s.

##### **4.3.3.1 Hairy people and the Czech *underground* culture**

The first Czech countercultural youth emerged as far back as the 1960s. It was inspired by the American hippy movement and beat generation. The practitioners wore long hair<sup>27</sup>, beards and unconventional clothes. They listened to rock music and pursued activities that were marginal in relation to the mainstream (see Pospíšil and Blažek 2010). In public space, the loose youth ostentatiously demonstrated their resistance, mental freedom and protest against the regime by means of their bodily features and spontaneous behavior, which resulted in an extreme hostility from their surroundings. Their mere presence in public attracted the attention of the Public Security, which regularly harassed and searched people on the basis of their hair length or other uncommon features in their appearance.

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<sup>27</sup> According to Pospíšil and Blažek (2010) any hair length reaching over the top of ears.

In totalitarian Czechoslovakia, we could also find a whole scene of unofficial culture, the so-called *Czech underground*. Among its pursuers, many people had long hair and an unconventional appearance. Some members were politically active, pursuing various dissenting activities aimed at overthrowing the totalitarian regime. Many members of *Czech underground* were actively involved in illegal cultural production; some of their music, literature, drama, poetry and art served as mediums aimed at the overthrow of the regime. As a result, all people involved with the *Czech underground* had to operate under constant threat of being revealed and charged with subversive anti-regime activities. Their activities therefore had to be held in unofficial and well-hidden spaces, or operate inside official bodies under the cover of different activities.

Spaces used by *Czech underground* during the totalitarian era were summed up in a book by two *underground* members - Stárek Čuňas and Kostúr (2010). The two eyewitnesses of the era tell a story about the spaces of *Czech underground* and their activities, which were predominantly confined to pubs, private apartments, selected outdoor sites, and even to workers' dormitories. According to Stárek Čuňas and Kostúr (2010), these were the most popular locations:

- **Pubs:** *Demínka*, *U Paraplíček*, *U Glaubiců*, *U Malvaze*, *U dvou slunců*, *U krále Brabantského*, *U zpěváků*, *U Lojzy*, *Na čurandě*, *U Fleků* or *Na Klamovce*.
- **Outdoor sites:** the stairs in front of the National Museum, the *Čas* archade, in front of the Hungarian cultural center in Venceslav square.
- **Private apartments** (so-called *open apartments*): famous were apartments of Milan Knížák<sup>28</sup> (Nový Svět street), of Dana and Jiří Němec (Ječná street 7), or of Vratislav "Quido" Machulka (Gorazdova street 10).

As for venues featuring live-music, the situation was much more complicated. The regime used to subject cultural production to strict censorship, ideologically vetting the lyrics and the musicians' themselves. In order to perform in official venues of cultural production, the so-called "kulturní centra" ("cultural centers"), musicians needed permits, issued by the state cultural committee, as proof of the musicians' political soundness. Many live concerts of Czechoslovak alternative musicians, as well as gatherings of people listening to alternative

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<sup>28</sup> Milan Knížek was a member of an underground art collective named *Aktual*, however, according to some opinions he was not really connected with *Czech underground*.

music imported from the West, were organized in a semi-legal way by an official voluntary cultural organization known as *Jazzová sekce* (*The Jazz Section*). But more often than not concerts were held in various pubs, restaurants, village ballrooms, at weddings or on other private occasions etc.

**Box 9. *Jazzová sekce* (*The Jazz Section*)**

*Jazzová sekce* was a subdivision of the Union of Musicians of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The organization resided in a small house on the street Ke Krčské stráni 611. Under the cover of being a union of jazz supporters, *Jazzová sekce* imported Western music, including new alternative styles. The organization held many concerts where bands were allowed to play without being submitted to censorship. The festival called *Pražské jazzové dny* (Prague Jazz Days) was especially important to the public performance of new alternative music. After a few unsuccessful attempts, the organization was finally abolished, together with the Union of Musicians in 1984. In 1986 the main protagonists of *Jazzová sekce* ended up imprisoned.

Stárek Čuňas and Kostúr (2010) describe the way a more radical political opposition in Czech *underground* increasingly affected its own members and their ability to operate in the society. Due to the crucial involvement of Czech *underground* in the preparation of the anti-communist document known as *Charter 77*, the regime's hostility towards the pursuers of *underground* culture markedly increased. Many key personalities of *underground* were imprisoned or forced into exile. *Underground* music production began to be driven out of the society as organizing concerts became increasingly constrained by various obstacles and complications, e.g. a stricter definition of disorderly conduct in by-law § 202, which authorized banishing people from public premises on the basis of trivial misdemeanors such as unconventional appearances or unusual ways of dancing. People in charge of various venues suitable for concerts and festivities became increasingly unwilling to cooperate with members of the *underground*.

The *underground* members that refused to leave into exile and avoided prison, tried to keep their scene alive by establishing a network of countryside refuges - little independent islands of freedom – hidden far away from the eyes of the regime. Many members of the *underground* moved to privately-owned rural houses, cottages, farmhouses, and barns in the countryside and small villages, where they continued to pursue their dissenting activities. Some of these locations became important cultural and social centers of *underground* culture,

visited on weekends by members who kept living in cities. These rural centers were also sites for experimenting with communal life and various types of alternative lifestyles.<sup>29</sup> Even though they were keeping their spaces secret, they were often raided or searched by the state security organs. But in their rural refuges the members of *underground* kept building civil society and relationships with local rural inhabitants.

The increasingly unsustainable societal situation in Czechoslovakia resulted in a wide crisis, gradually crumbling the authority of the regime, whose final collapse culminated in the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The dissent of members of *underground* played an indisputable role in overthrowing totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia. After the revolution, some of the leading members of Czech *underground* became high-profile personalities of the new democracy. The playwright, essayist, and poet Václav Havel, one of the main authors of *Charter 77*, became the first Czechoslovak post-communist president, and consequently the first president of the newly established Czech Republic. It is currently estimated that out of all people who had signed *Charter 77*, about 40% were members of the *underground* (Stárek Čuñas and Kostúr, 2010). Also other members of the unofficial culture in socialist Czechoslovakia later held important public positions<sup>30</sup> or became important and reputable personalities in the area of literature, art, and music or theatre.<sup>31</sup>

Some of the spatial legacies of the Czech *underground* still exist. In Prague's Lesser Town we can still find the so-called *Lennon Wall*, created as a memorial to the death of John Lennon (assassinated on December 8, 1980), probably the only notion of "graffiti" in totalitarian Czechoslovakia, and a unique site that till this time commemorates the presence of oppositional cultures in socialist Prague. Out of the rural *underground* centers established during the former regime, veterans still go to the estate called *Skalákův Mlýn* in Meziříčko near Třebíč, South Moravia. The site currently faces persecution from local authorities due to *freetekno* parties, which the estate community occasionally allows to be held on their property.

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<sup>29</sup> According to Stárek Čuñas and Kostúr (2010) Czech *underground* communities in many ways resembled communities of American hippies and beat generation, who escaped to the countryside due to their alienation from the American mainstream society and political establishment. But unlike their American peers, the members of Czech *underground* were forced to inhabit remote rural areas not out of their own free will, but due to increasing oppression by a system that hunted and strove to eliminate them

<sup>30</sup> Previously persecuted artist Milan Knížák later became the chief of the Czech National Gallery, Michal Kocáb - the front man of the band Pražský Výběr, banned by the former regime - became the Minister for Human Rights and Minorities etc.

<sup>31</sup> In literature for example Josef Škvorecký, Milan Kundera, Svatopluk Karásek, Bohumil Hrabal, Egon Bondy, or Ludvík Vaculík, in music Ivan Magor Jirous or music band Plastic People of the Universe, in theatre, mainly Václav Havel and Vlasta Chramostová.

#### 4.3.3.2 Punk – Anarchy in Czechoslovakia

At the end of 1970s, the variety of Czechoslovak people considered to be *loose youth* was broadened by members of the punk subculture, a new countercultural youth movement imported from the UK and the US. In the local context punk was ideologically less dangerous than the radically oppositional *underground*, as most young punks were smitten with a new type of alternative music and visual stylization, and generally remained idle towards the political implications embedded in the more sophisticated faction of the punk movement. For the first punks in Czechoslovakia, anarchy predominantly served as a symbolic denial of the regime, but not as a platform for systematic political organizing. Despite this fact, the regime regarded young punks as highly subversive, mainly due to their ferocious visual stylization, articulated nihilism and their refusal to adhere to socialistic ideals. Turning to the use of repressive tactics, the regime eventually drove young Czechoslovak punks into opposition.

On the other hand, according to Fuchs (2002) the radicalism of the *underground* towards the end of the 1970s, ensured that early Czechoslovak punk music was initially seen as a harmless form of alternative rock. In the beginning, several punk bands were able to legally perform at district cultural centers and music festivals, even in official music halls such as *Palác Lucerna* or *Eden*. Concerts were often organized through the *Socialistický svaz mládeže* (Association of the Socialist Youth), or again, through *Jazzová sekce*. Fuchs (2002) remarks, quoting some of the period testimonies, that punk played an important role in lowering the scale of music production and in bringing music closer to audiences. During the 1970s, when most concerts were played by so-called *megabands* and were held in big stadiums, punk brought a revival of the club scene. Totalitarian Prague had only a few clubs, out of which the most popular were *Junior klub Na Chmelnici* in Prague 3, *Klub 007* in the dormitories of the Technical College in Strahov, and the amateur club *U Zábranských*. Many concerts were also held in different district cultural centers, and, as with the *underground*, in pubs, ballrooms, outdoors and at various festivities etc.

##### **Box 10. Klub 007 Strahov**

A student club in the basement of a dormitory at the Technical College, located on Strahov Hill in close proximity to Prague Castle. Since it was founded in 1969, it has been one of the most popular clubs in Prague, having hosted musicians from all over the world. Thanks to its location on academic property, *Klub 007 Strahov* enjoyed more freedom than most other similar clubs in the country during the previous regime. As a

result, the club was open to many new styles and trends in music, and was able to retain its underground atmosphere. The regime's single attempt to replace the club by a discotheque ended unsuccessfully. In 1989, the club played an important role in students' political organizing prior to the revolution on November 17th.

After 1989, *Klub 007 Strahov* remained an important center for new music trends, which kept enjoying the advantage of low rent. However, the club is contemporarily threatened by demolition due to a strong lobby that is calling for the replacement of the student dormitories with luxurious residences (Pixová 2007a).

Nonetheless, the relatively free situation changed in 1983, when an ideological magazine called *Tribuna* published an article in which the author Jan Krýzl warned against the dangers punk subculture posed to the socialistic society. The whole scene then came under the target of the regime, becoming a subject of repression (see Vaněk 2002, Fuchs 2002, Smolík 2010).

**Box 11. “Nová vlna se starým obsahem” - New Wave with an old Content (an article published in 1983 by Jan Krýzl in the magazine *Tribuna*)**

In his article, Krýzl misinterpreted the ideological content of punk music by reading it as a result of a capitalistic attempt to dilute the political content of rock music from the 1960s. According to Krýzl, Western 1960s' rock bands fought against capitalism and American war policy, while 1970s' and 1980s' punk rock was nihilist and disillusioned; its motto “no future” was supposed to discourage the capitalist youth from the fight against capitalism, and the socialist youth off building a socialist society. At the same time, Krýzl condemned punk as visually and culturally abhorrent to the socialistic youth, and castigated all organizers and responsible administrators for allowing punk rock music to be displayed publicly (see Smolík 2010, p. 251-255).

After the article was published, organizing public concerts became much more complicated and largely depended on the arbitrariness of the officials involved in the process of cultural production. Prague's city districts were said to vary considerably with the different approaches of local cultural inspectors; each individual inspector had a different personality and attitude, which then set conditions for the cultural program of the entire district (see Haubert 2007). Through the accounts of Fuchs (2002) and Vaněk (2002) we learn that certain bands were very inventive in terms of tricking the system and finding ways to perform legally. They used to change the names of their bands, submit fake lyrics to the committee, or simply accept certain trade-offs with the regime. Other bands that did not (want to) find their way to

perform legally remained in illegality and created “an underground network of unofficial concerts” (Fuchs 2002, p. 88). Nonetheless, both legal and illegal concerts were often raided and dispersed by the police for trivial reasons, such as illegal usage of English lyrics, swearing, and overly loud music. Towards to the end of the 1980s, the atmosphere loosened up and organizing concerts became easier again. Nonetheless, police violence against the pursuers of punk subculture, both in public space or during concerts, remained an inherent part of the scene. The regimes repression of essentially harmless alternative youth only contributed to its own crumbling and final breakdown in 1989.

#### **4.4 Enthusiastic beginnings after liberation**

In the preceding chapter, I outlined the specificities of the inequalities in a socialist city. These inequalities were of an ideological character, limiting people’s freedom to pursue various activities and culture that the communist party did not approve of. Spatial inequalities stemmed not from the height of land rent, but rather from the concentration of state control aimed against oppositional movements. In cities, where control was the highest, alternative spaces and pursuers of alternative spatial practices were very exposed, forcing many to seek refuges in the countryside. The Velvet Revolution led to people gaining new freedoms and the democratization of the country, however it also created a fluid and unstable zone in transition. The 1990s decade was a period of major societal, institutional, and spatial transformations, during which cities were blundering through the unknown terrain of the new socio-economic order, and experimenting with the democratic political process and decentralized power.

In this chapter, I will show in what way the democratization and newly gained freedom following the Velvet Revolution in 1989 changed the atmosphere and the general context of alternative spaces and activities in the city. After, I will show the ways in which the transforming country began to approximate traditional capitalist cities by quickly adopting alternative cultures, their spatial patterns, and other practices from the West, as well as the way in which the context remained different due to the socialist legacies and the dynamic processes of transformation.

#### **4.4.1 Alternative activities during the transformation**

Liberalization meant a great shift in the meaning and content of activities and culture regarded as “alternative”. After more than four decades of isolation and suppression by the former regime, these alternative phenomena became legitimate constituents of the city, which were able to manifest themselves in public space, reaching a wider scope of the society.

Many people felt that the society was open to any kind of initiative, including the unconventional and unfamiliar ones. At first, many cultural influences imported from abroad were new and experimental, giving them a sense of alternativeness. In the postmodern context of the 1990s, alternative activities were no longer strictly distinct from each other on the basis of specific subcultures and the social groups who pursued them. The era saw the emergence of so-called *postsubcultures*, which Muggleton (2000) defines as hybrid mixes of many alternative cultures characterized by fragmentation, heterogeneity, and fluidity. Therefore, when post-socialist Prague got hit by the influx of new cultural trends from abroad, a multitude of new alternative fashions, subcultures, lifestyles, and their various mixtures started blending with the local ones, turning Prague into a big subcultural melting pot.

During this enthusiastic era, an increasing number of people started to experiment with cultural production, organizing concerts, various festivals, and other cultural events. Others tried to pursue alternative business activities, opening enterprises such as clubs, bars, pubs, galleries, or shops with subcultural clothes and records. Some people attempted to squat vacant buildings in order to start an alternative cultural project or a space of political resistance, the most famous of which is *Radio Stalin*, Czechoslovakia’s first independent radio station, which began broadcasting from an unauthorized establishment in the empty underground premises under the former monument of Stalin in Letná; the station survives to this day in a different location as *Radio 1*. However, none of the other projects started by squatting empty premises ended in longer-term success, despite numerous attempts by squatters to come to an agreement with the Municipality or private owners.

Nonetheless, alternative activities also dangerously started turning into consumerism. The breakdown of totalitarian socialism was accompanied by young people’s eagerness to replace their artificially constructed collective identity with postmodern identities constructed through individualized consumption. In line with Muggleton’s postsubcultural theory, new subcultures in the liberalized context cared less about political resistance and self-expression through non-conventional activities, and their conception of alternativeness started to be more

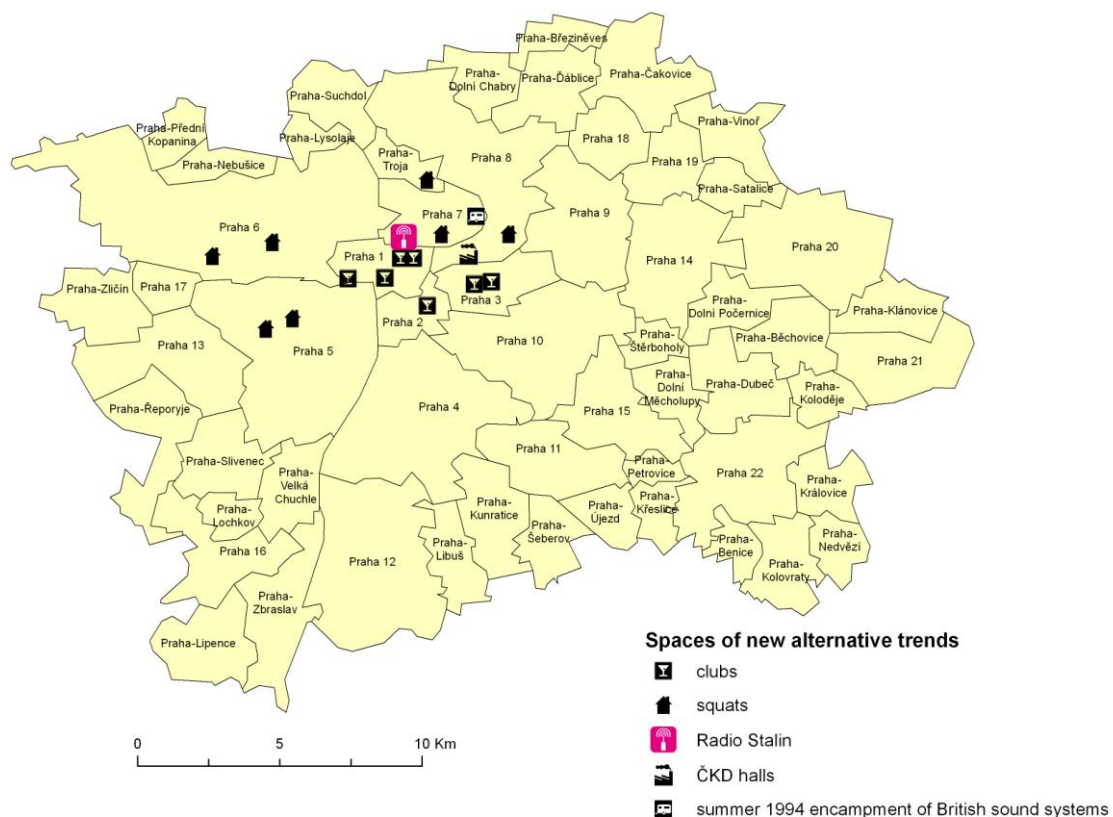


about joy and escapism from everydayness (see Muggleton 2000 in Kolářová 2011). Many young people simply turned into passive consumers of alternative cultural production.

#### 4.4.2 Spatiotemporal regulations of alternative spaces in post-socialism

In the 1990s, Prague's spatial organization underwent vast transformations and started to be remodeled by the forces of the free market and the processes of privatization, property restitution and rent deregulations. During the initial stages of this process, many spaces were temporarily vacant, often with unexplained ownership. People and civil groups took over all kinds of available spaces, regardless of their location in the city; most new clubs, pubs and bars opened in the city center and its close surroundings, while squat projects emerged in suitable properties in various parts of the city. However, most of these alternative spaces did not remain long, or quickly lost their alternativeness. Administrative requirements and

**Figure 3.** Prague's spaces of new alternative trends during early transformation



Source: Author

regulations, new legislation, as well as the increasing imperative of money, eventually started to push them out; either due to their inability to generate profit, or due to their subversive character. Most spaces that were able to resist these pressures slowly lost their initial aura of alternativeness and edginess as their functioning became subject to the necessity of profit making, or when they were surpassed by newer and edgier trends. In that way, many alternative cultures became subject to commercialization, commodification, and massification. The only spaces that remained truly alternative were those that kept placing the value of culture above that of profit, retained their progressiveness and experimental character, or assumed an oppositional attitude towards life under capitalism.

Nonetheless, the initial short period after the revolution was characterized by an atmosphere of true liberty and an elevated tolerance towards newly emerging societal and cultural phenomena. A great shift was also in the possibility to occupy the city at night without being surveyed by the Police. The onset of the free market gave rise to the development of a nightlife economy, and various enterprises started to operate during the nighttime. This was closely connected with the development of new nighttime infrastructures, and a general invasion of an increased number of functions into the nocturnal space.

#### **4.4.3 New alternative trends and their spaces in post-socialist Prague**

Throughout the 1990s, alternative spaces in Prague were defined by the emergence of three key phenomena:

- 1) Rise of Prague's club and pub scene.
- 2) Emergence of the squatters' movement.
- 3) Arrival of *freetekno* and free parties.

##### **4.4.3.1 The rise of Prague's club and pub scene**

As the city with the largest population in the country, Prague, after the liberation of the 1990s, became the main hotspot for the emergence of the nighttime economy and the development of "urban nightscapes". In the West, neoliberal restructuring was already subjecting spaces of nighttime economy to intensifying corporatization and standardization (Chatterton and Hodkinson 2003). In Prague, however, the emerging club scene was rather independent and

experimental during the early transformations, mainly due to the socialistic societies' lack of previous experience with night-time economy and the initial focus of foreign investors on other aspects of local economy.

Many new clubs were founded in abandoned theatres and ballrooms, located predominantly in central parts of the city. Pubs, on the other hand, have always been an indispensable constituent of life in Prague, even during socialism - although under the former regime, enterprises popular with alternative youth used to be ordinary traditional pubs and dive bars located predominantly in the historic core of the city. Pubs were not allowed to display any ostentatious features of difference and, in the time of omnipresent hostility towards the alternative youth, their popularity consisted mainly in the tolerant attitude of their staff. Democratization finally enabled people to design their enterprises according to their taste, without being suspected of disseminating dangerous foreign influences. However, due to high property prices in the historic core most of these alternative spaces started to conglomerate in the surrounding residential neighborhoods (see Pixová 2007b).

In 1990s, Prague finally got its own subcultural enterprises popular with specific social groups, easily recognizable by the passersby. Those who started experimenting with night-time economy after 1989 were predominantly people who had already been involved in alternative culture before the political change; running their own alternative enterprise was to certain degree a fulfillment of their long denied wishes. Some of them were successful and some were not. Some alternative spaces eventually closed down due to lack of profit, others were violently closed down due to suspected drug trade. Some spaces were shifting around the city – run by the same people, but changing locations. Some of the most successful alternative spaces have operated until today, but usually at the cost of gradual conformity to the mainstream demonstrated through the loss of their initial alternativeness and edginess, and their increased orientation towards profit.

#### **Box 12. The most famous clubs opened in 1990s**

**Roxy:** A club founded in 1992 on Dlouhá Street, Prague 1, in premises neglected by the former regime, which had originally served as a restaurant, cinema, and a ball room. *Linhart Foundation* transformed *Roxy* into one of the most significant centers of alternative and experimental culture in the country, consequently gaining it an international reputation.

**Radost FX:** Emerging around the years 1991-1992 on Bělehradská Street, Prague 2, in the underground premises of a residential building, the club was established by an American film director, producer, and photographer Roberto Zoli and his wife Bethea. Due to the owners' proficiency in design, as well as their previous involvement in New York's underground music, art and club scene in 1980s, the club quickly became an internationally renowned center of the latest dance music. In 1999, the club was voted one of 20 best clubs of the world by the British magazine *Ministry*.

**Rock Café:** Initiated in 1990 by the artist group *Nový Horizont*, the club's aim was to support new music bands and interpreters. The premises in Národní Street, Prague 1, serve for concerts, theatre, art shows etc.

**Palác Akropolis:** Originally a theatre built in 1927 on Kubelkova street, Prague 3, it was bought in 1991 by a newly established theatre and music agency called *Žižkovská divadelní a hudební agentura*, which together with the help of the foundation *Nadace Pražská pětka* reconstructed the theatre and opened a new concert hall, with two smaller adjacent stages.

**Propast:** A rock club on Lipenská Street, Prague 3, popular among various subcultural youth. Due to the alleged presence of drug dealers, the city decided to close the club down. It was brutally raided by a commando police in 1996. Currently the club operates under the name *Základna*, but its legendary fame has been lost.

**Bunkr:** A legendary rock club established in a former bomb-shelter on Lodecká Street, Prague 1. The club gained international fame, but on January 21, 1997 it ended in the same brutal way as *Propast*, never to be opened again.

#### 4.4.3.2 The golden age of squatting in Prague

One of the most important alternative phenomena that emerged in Prague shortly after liberation was the squatters' movement (see subchapter n. 2.2.2.2). Růžička (2006) says that the years from 1990 to 1998 were considered the "golden age" of Czech squatting; approximately thirty attempts to squat different buildings were made in the whole country, out of which twelve took place in Prague, where a number of groups and individuals made several attempts to establish a squat center for politics and culture. Squats were predominantly municipally owned empty buildings, and people leaning towards squatting were mostly members of the anarcho-autonomous and other alternative movements, including several *underground* veterans.

Most squats in Prague usually did not last longer than a few weeks or months. During the initial years of the movement, most evictions were relatively peaceful, without squatters' resistance. Squatters in Prague typically made an effort to receive authorization for their

activities and some of them were willing to accept certain trade-offs. In spite of this fact, the majority of their efforts were fruitless. Squatters encountered a rigid approach by the state bureaucracy and were forced to cope with violent evictions. Růžička (2006) pointed out that, during early 1990s, the Municipality in Prague was not prepared for the sudden emergence of squatting and as of this date has yet to create a legal platform that would stop squatting from being regarded as a criminal activity. The term *squatting* does not exist in Czech legislation; as a result it falls under bill § 249a from 1961, which makes illegal the unauthorized occupation and usage of a property that belongs to somebody else (Růžička 2006, p. 30). The bill protects the rights of the owner of the property, but ignores the purpose and circumstances of the occupation, as well as the property's utilization by its owner.

As a result, even projects with a wide societal outreach and provably beneficial objectives, by default end up failing due to local authorities' disapproval and reluctance to negotiate with squatters. Růžička (2006) claims that Prague authorities are aware of the approach applied in some Western metropolises; nonetheless, they argue that the projects of squatters in Prague, as well as the Czech socio-cultural environment, are different from those in e.g. Berlin or Amsterdam, where many squats have a substantial artistic and creative potential. According to the local authorities, it is this fact that prevents the legalization of squatting in Prague. Since the Municipality halts even those squat projects that have a proven societal benefit and cultural outreach, it seems more likely that the idea of squatting is simply not consistent with the city's project of neoliberal restructuring, due to which societal and cultural issues have gained a secondary importance.

Below are descriptions of four 1990s' projects, initiated by squatters in Prague, which serve as an important illustration of how Prague authorities have negotiated with marginal interest:

### **Box 13. The most successful squats in Prague**

***Ladronka:*** The first Czech squat that gained international significance was founded on a farm estate *Ladronka*, a municipally owned baroque listed building in Prague 6. The abandoned and decaying farmhouse was occupied by the members of the Anarchist Federation, and transformed into an autonomous socio-cultural and ecological center, comparable to similar centers in the West. *Ladronka* had its own infoshop, gallery, and premises for music and theatre shows. It held public debates, lectures, and annual festivals, and provided a platform for political organization, preparations of demonstrations, as well as printing for autonomous press. The squatters' project managed

to survive for seven years, but over time its initial exemplary political activity declined as the inhabitants had to invest an increasing amount of time and energy into negotiations with the Municipality. The squatters' attempts to gain legal status for their project started by establishing a civil organization, which then made a contract with administrative representatives concerning their rights and duties in relation to the occupied building. According to Růžicka (2006), this was the first case where negotiations between squatters and the Municipality led to a consensus. But further cooperation ended in failure as the state and municipal organs never legalized the autonomous center itself, most probably due to *Ladronka* squatters' actively engaging in anti-globalization protests against the congress of the IMF and WB, held in Prague in September 2000.<sup>32</sup> The squat was finally sold to a private company, which consequently rebuilt the whole estate and turned it into a commercial recreational center. The eviction of *Ladronka* was not peaceful. Due to *Ladronka's* relatively long existence and international reputation, several petitions and demonstrations were organized in order to save the project. In the end, supported by special riot units and inadequate violence, the center was evicted by approximately 60–80 policemen.

***Medáci in Staré Střešovice:*** Another significant squatters' project in Prague was initiated by a squatters' community in Střešovice neighborhood of Prague 6. The project deserves our attention due to its extensive engagement in the grassroots development of the local community. An account of the squatters' project initiated by a group of young people in a pressing housing situation can be found in the diploma thesis of Mertová (2002)<sup>33</sup>. In 1995, a group of young people disillusioned by the unavailability of affordable housing decided to occupy three historical working-class houses (buildings n. 946, n. 96 and n. 79 in Starostřešovická street) which had been long abandoned, dilapidated, and scrubby. The squatters received verbal consent of all neighboring residents for occupying the buildings; neighbors perceived their presence as a way of increasing the safety of the area. Squatters then invested a lot of money into the redevelopment and maintenance of the property, while adhering to a set of basic rules of cohabitation. The rules included the duty to engage in organizing cultural programs for the local community, and prohibition against stealing electricity, drug taking etc.

In 1998 the squatters founded a civil organization called *Dobročinný spolek Medáků ve Starých Střešovicích* (*Charitable Union of Bumblebees in Old Střešovice; further only Medáks*)<sup>34</sup>; the name was inspired by a historical volunteer group that had operated in the neighborhood during the first half of the 20th century. The newly founded *Medáks* officially committed themselves to nature protection, support for noncommercial culture and artists, and to the preservation of monuments, community development etc. Consequently *Medáks* made several attempts to make a contract with the Municipality of Prague in order to legalize their right to inhabit and reconstruct the three occupied buildings. The Municipality launched a selection procedure, in which financial factors played the decisive role. In the end, administration of the three houses was assigned to the

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<sup>32</sup> After the massive protests against World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Seattle, 1999, the IMF and WB congress in Prague was the next protest site of the strengthening global movement against economic globalization.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.medaci.cz/studie/diplomka.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.medaci.cz/>

local authorities of Prague 6, allowing *Medáks* to continue their wide-ranging activities, which included many environmental, and conservationist projects, charitable activities, or educational programs. These focused on a wide range of people, especially children, seniors, the homeless; even people with mental disabilities.

In 1999 *Medáks* launched a project called *Alternativa pro Staré Střešovice* (*An Alternative for Old Střešovice*), whose aim was to draw attention to the local historical community. The project's strategy was to reconstruct the three occupied buildings into their original form, and to use them for public meetings, cultural events and creative activities. Most activities held by *Medáks* had a social aspect and largely contributed to the development of the local community and consolidation of its inhabitants' communal feeling. Each year, more than a thousand of visitors attended their colorful program. One of *Medáks*' biggest achievements was an official declaration of a monument preservation area in Old Střešovice, and the ability to receive organizational and financial support from different NGOs and foundations. In 2000, they were awarded by foundations Civilia and Via for the most inspiring non-profit project of the year. As Mertová (2002) points out, over time authorities and local community no more perceived the occupied buildings as a squat; and *Medáks* as squatters.

However, in 2001 local authorities of the city district of Prague 6 launched a new selection procedure for the use of the three buildings; this time all applicants were required to have a cultural and beneficial purpose to their projects. Růžička (2006) says that the procedure ended with two of the three occupied buildings being sold to new private owners, providing only building n. 79 to *Medáks*. This basically meant abandoning their project, against which *Medáks* appealed. They were then called upon by the local authorities to leave the occupied building n. 96, assigned to the new owner, who consequently attempted to evict *Medáks* by means of private security agency. *Medáks* launched a home defense and continued their program. They established a new civil organization called *Slovanská lípa*, which the call for eviction did not apply to, and brought a suit against Prague 6 for not taking care of its property, and for evicting people who do so. According to the testimony of Martin Skalský, a member of *Medáks*, the contemporary mayor of Prague 6, Chalupa, then evicted *Medáks* by means of a security agency in order to get rid of them prior to the judgment's passing.

***Sochorka and Papírna:*** For almost seven years shortly after the revolution a group of anarchists occupied a residential building on Podplukovníka Sochora street in Prague 7. The building turned into the so-called *Sochorka* squat in 1992 after all remaining residents left. The squatters got evicted in 1997, but in return, the local authorities provided them with premises in a house in the Za Papírnou street. These premises were called *Papírna* and for a period of six years it served the squatters' project *Centrum svobodného vzdělávání* (*Center for Free Education*), anarchist meetings, the printing of an anarchist magazine *A-kontra*, and for occasional concerts. In December 2003, *Papírna* got evicted due to the reconstruction of the house and neighbors' complaints.

***Autonomous center Milada:*** The squat, called simply *Milada*, was founded in villa *Milada* in Trója, Prague 8, in 1998, and lasted until summer 2009. Due to more than a decade long lifespan, *Milada* became the longest existing squat in Czechia. Since the squat remained operational throughout my research, it therefore should be discussed in the context of the neoliberal state, which I do in chapter 6.1.1.

#### **4.4.3.3 Freetekno**

The liberation of Czechoslovakia coincided with the toughening situation of the nomadic subcultures evolved around electronic music in the UK. During the initial years of transformation in the 1990s, Prague was an ideal niche for *freetekno*, a free spirited cultural phenomenon founded on transience, subversion, mobility, and unrestrained attitudes towards space, characterized by spontaneous land occupations (see Box 6.). *Freetekno* arrived to Prague in 1994, and completely revolutionized the local conception of electronic music, space and partying.

*Freetekno* evolved in the UK at the beginning of the country's neoliberal restructuring. By the early 90's, the atmosphere in the UK had become tougher and illegal parties and festivals were increasingly restricted and combated by state authorities, culminating with the passing of the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) in 1994, which significantly curtailed people's freedom to gather. The nomadic fraction of the *freetekno* scene started searching for a safer refuge in France. However, the French authorities followed with their own repressive program and many nomadic sound systems from the UK fled the region and headed further east.

Czechia was the first stopover on the eastbound road of the *freetekno* nomads. In Prague, electronic music had already gained substantial popularity, although mainly in the commercial form inspired by the German techno and house music scene, and was confined to indoor clubs. Parties that were free and outdoor were an unknown phenomenon. The British sound systems introduced the Czechs to the idea of organizing their own parties, outside of expensive clubs, arranged and decorated by D.I.Y. principles. Also their electronic music was different from that known from clubs; it was its underground version – rawer, darker, more rhythmic, and less melodic. The beginnings of the Czech scene were edgy, marginal and adventurous (see Box 14.), however, with few exceptions, the approach of the Czech sound systems lacked the spontaneity, free spiritedness and political consciousness of the British nomads. The local embracing of *freetekno*, in many ways is reminiscent of how the first Czechoslovak punks embraced the arrival of punk music – impressed by its directly perceptible aspects, but not so aware of its political implications. The first parties were held in abandoned mansions and military shelters, and in squats, but also in clubs, like *Klub 007*, and different cultural centers, sports-halls etc. Outdoor parties were held when the weather warmed up starting with the pagan festivity of *Witches Burning* held on the last day of April which became the symbolic annual shift of the urban scene to outdoor locations outside of the city. The outdoor summer season annually culminated in a massive illegal outdoor reunion



called *Czechtek*, held at the turn from July to August, and visited by hundreds of sound systems and thousands of visitors from across Europe. Local situation started to change drastically at the turn of the millennium. *Freetekno* became popular among masses of young people and started to lose its initial edginess. Also, the brutally violent attack from a 1,000-person strong anti-riot police force aimed at dispersing the crowds attending the 2005 *Czechtek*, left Czech *freetekno* subculture disillusioned; some sound systems started to operate in various legal and semi-legal ways, while others started to focus on parties held abroad.

#### **Box 14. British *freetekno* invasion in Prague**

*Mutek*, the conjoint project of two legendary British sound systems, *Spiral Tribe* and *Mutoid Waste Company*, arrived in Prague with its trucks and campers in summer 1994. They established their first encampment on the Libeň Island on the Vltava River, underneath the bridge connecting neighborhoods of Holešovice, and Libeň. The sound systems occupied the site and played electronic music for almost two weeks. They had no major conflicts with the state organs, and on the other hand, they immensely impressed local alternative youth (some eyewitnesses describe this intercultural encounter, which later catalyzed a massive cultural turn among local adherents of electronic music, as one of the most important moments in their lives).

Wimmer's (2006) account shows that the first two British sound systems in Prague found their first audience among punks and squatters concentrated around the *Ladronka* squat, and even inspired some of them to start their own sound systems and organize their own free parties. During the early beginnings of the Czech *freetekno* scene, sound systems operated in a relatively free non-oppressive environment; the approach of the police and authorities was rather hesitant and confused, as they had no experience in dealing with the new phenomenon. The subculture was initially minor, alternative, closely interconnected with the squatters' movement, and operated as a true counterculture. One of the first Czech sound systems, *Circus Alien*, resided in the *Ladronka* squat. The first free parties were held in *Ladronka*, or in the abandoned mansion *Cibulka* in Prague 5. *Circus Alien* was probably the only Czech pioneering *freetekno* commune that had a true radical political stance and practiced alternative lifestyles adopted from the British nomadic sound systems. *Circus Alien* also co-organized different demonstrations or street party protests, e.g. the *Global Street Party*<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> *Global Street Party* was held in 36 cities around the world. Its main purpose was a protest against global capitalism and its consequences (Wimmer 2006, p. 54).

## **4.5 The neoliberal state**

At the turn of the millennium, Prague was still a post-socialist city in transition (Sýkora 2009). According to Sýkora and Bouzarovski (2012), the first decade of post-socialist transformations consisted of a relatively fast reconfiguration of local institutions, while reconfigurations of societal practices and urban space, processes which are much slower and gradual, were still on-going and incomplete. During the second decade of post-socialist transition these slow and gradual processes were already being shaped by the more or less completely reconfigured institutional order, which now focused on the consolidation of the new socio-economic order in other spheres of the society, including its socio-spatial organization, and the land-rent mechanisms. Most property in Prague was now privately owned and the built environment and land-use patterns were subject to outright forces of the free market, interconnected with the global economy; after Czechia's admission into the European Union in 2004, local urban development also partly became subject to EU policies and funding.

Closer to the end of the decade, Prague was rapidly approximating the standard practices of the developed capitalist societies in terms of rising corporate and state control over the city's nightlife economy and in terms of banishing the last illegal remainders of alternative spatial practices. In 2008, the booming economy and rapid real estate development became affected by the global economic crisis caused by a crash in the US housing market; development slowed down, companies began having financial problems and the buying power of the people went down. Nonetheless, the manifestations of the crisis in Prague's environment displayed specific features shaped by the local context and post-socialist legacies, and these were affecting Prague's alternative spaces as well. In this new context, alternative cultures and their spaces once again became victims of bad governing, this time mainly due to the Czech governments' reluctance against regulating the way markets impact society and against tackling deepening inequalities. Alternative cultures have therefore again become important for reflecting on the growing oppressiveness produced by neoliberal economy, as well as on the inequalities which are continually sidelining alternative spaces despite the country's transformation into a liberal democracy and declared inclusiveness.

#### **4.5.1 Alternative activities in neoliberal Prague**

As neoliberal restructuring began to dominate the society, various activities that used to be considered alternative during the previous decade had blended with mainstream culture; a number of centrally located clubs such as *Roxy*, *Radost FX* or *Palác Akropolis* lost their progressiveness and turned into outdated municipally subsidized constituents of the city's mainstream culture, widely accepted by consumer society. In the meantime, people were increasingly favoring outdoor parties and festivals, quickly turning from illegal spontaneous and somewhat exclusive events, into a well-marketed alternative type of culture for mass-consumption. In Prague, a few high-capacity venues such as *Abaton*, *Matrix* or *Harfa* were established for the purpose of hosting indoor versions of these big parties. Meanwhile, more deviant and spontaneous forms of alternative space use, such as squatting or illegal unannounced parties, were increasingly dispersed by police or security agencies as the protection of private ownership became more strictly enforced and an increasing number of private owners gradually learned to enforce their exclusive right to their property and civil rights in cases of trespassing or peace disturbances. Throughout the decade, all Prague's squats were closed down and evicted squatters started to operate within legal and semi-legal frameworks – some of them opened anarchist infocenters, while others tried to live alternative lifestyles in legally provided spaces.

Alternative activities of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century became increasingly marked by the rise of the so-called new middle class, a special demographic involving also young artists, creative professionals, hedonist subcultures, students, academics and activists. In comparison with the West, the new middle class started to evolve in Prague with a slight delay, but in line with Ley's (1996) description, its members featured special needs and taste in cultural consumption, lifestyle, and also spatial preferences. Members of Prague's new middle class became important actors in creating new alternative trends and spatial patterns, and in establishing new alternative spaces such as art centers for galleries, studios, fairs and exhibitions, predominantly in various former industrial buildings. During the same time, Prague also had a couple of grassroots community projects established in various alternative ways, and used by a wide spectrum of people from the surrounding areas. These centers served for socializing and noncommercial culture despite multiple challenges imposed by local authorities.

#### **4.5.2 Spatiotemporal regulations of alternative spaces in neoliberal Prague**

Changes related to the interplay of late post-socialist transformations and neoliberal restructuring also affected alternative spaces in Prague in terms of their number and position within urban space. The hierarchical organization of functional use of urban space, on the basis of different profitability, had been more or less completed, and the booming economy and omnipresent development significantly impacted rising property prices, especially affecting the central parts of the city. Lucrative areas and new gentrification hotspots in the inner city turned into environments extremely hostile towards alternative and non-profitable uses of space. Existing alternative spaces had to become more mass-culture oriented, or shorten the time of their music production to avoid peace disturbances, or to relocate further to the periphery. Some alternative spaces ceased to exist, leaving their owners and users disillusioned and failed by the imperative of money associated with life under capitalism.

As more and more spaces were becoming privatized or redeveloped, the amount of available space for alternative use was diminishing. Eventually, even squatters located in peripheral areas were evicted. Pursuers of alternative cultures had to start negotiating with private owners and with the municipalities in order to get premises needed for their activities. Some students and various members of artistic and creative communities in Prague were even able to find some common ground with real estate developers by showing interest in original and peculiar spaces; spaces such as abandoned industrial buildings and warehouses, architectural heritage underestimated by the mainstream, as well as new, highly modern spaces with progressive designs. In the second half of the decade, the special needs and taste of these members of the new middle class started intersecting with the emerging economic recession and development decline. Real estate developers and various property owners, affected by the stagnating real estate market, started to be more open towards various alternative uses of their underused, often large-scale property that temporarily could not be redeveloped or destroyed. Consequently, new patterns of alternative use started to enliven Prague's urban environment, especially in large development areas of former industrial zones on the edges of the inner city. Nonetheless, the alternative use was treated only as a temporary solution for limiting risks related to the economic and development decline, not as a long-term way of supporting culture and increasing the livability and vibrancy of urban environments. Unless changes are made to the current policy, resurrection of economic growth might potentially push current spaces for alternative culture further to the periphery – to places

where they could not reach their audiences.

**Figure 4.** Prague's alternative spaces founded after the year 2000



Source: Author

#### 4.5.3 Alternative spaces in neoliberal Prague: The case studies of this project

While the development of alternative spaces during the first decade of transformations could be described as a hurried attempt to catch up with the diversity and plurality known in the West, the second decade of transformations created a context for alternative spaces that became reminiscent of the way in which neoliberalism has been gradually eliminating and assimilating alternative spaces for the needs of capital accumulation in the West since as early as 1980s. The club scene became commercialized and the truly alternative spaces that managed to retain their progressiveness or their oppositional stance towards the mainstream society were eventually succumbed to rising competition and property prices due to their narrow orientation at particular subcultures, countercultures and other marginal groups, and

due to their inability to attract more affluent customers or public funding. Illegal and subversive projects were increasingly more compelled to operate within regulated and policed environment and to submit their activities and cultural production to the revenue generating imperative. New art projects created in former industrial zones were eventually displaced by development, or succumbed to commercial interests to be able to finance their vast dilapidated objects.

In Part 5 and Part 6 I am focusing on 14 case studies of alternative spaces that existed in Prague during late neoliberal restructuring, especially throughout the economic crisis. For the purpose of this project, I am dividing the case studies into two categories on the basis of their purpose: Part 5 is focused on the spaces for alternative culture and experimentation, and Part 6 on the spaces of resistance. Within each category the spaces are divided on the basis of their rate of deviance from the legal and economic structures. Part 7 is devoted to the evaluation of all case studies in relation to the concept of the *right to the city*, urban development and urban politics.

## 5. Prague's spaces for alternative culture and experimentation

In the years 2010 – 2012, Prague had several alternative spaces, which predominantly served the production of progressive, experimental or low-profile music and art, various non-profit projects and activities, and socializing. Out of these spaces, I have selected eight most important ones and used them as case studies. Except for two spaces – *Hala C* and *Hala Thámová* – these spaces still exist. All eight case studies represent spaces that are, or were operated in a legal way with the permission of owners – be it the city, a company, or a private person. On the other hand, they differ from each other in terms of their cooperation with mainstream and commercial interests; some researched spaces for alternative culture and experimentation in Prague have a neutral attitude towards the possibility of such cooperation - they neither oppose it nor seek for it. Others actively look for the benefits of cooperating with commercial interests. No cases of strict opposition against any kind of commercial support were recorded.

**Figure 5.** Party at *Trafacka*



Source: trafacka.net

Regarding the properties where these alternative spaces are or were located, most of them use former industrial buildings, which used to be long abandoned prior to their new alternative use. Only *Cross Club* is using a residential building, which was also underused for several years. Also a special case is *Bubenská*, a project located in a huge heritage office building that conventional companies aren't interested in. In the following chapters, I will introduce all eight case studies of spaces for alternative culture and experimentation in more detail, focusing on the people who use them, the people or institutions that own them and provide them to the alternative users, the properties themselves and their surroundings, as well as the establishment and financing of the projects. Further evaluation of the case studies will be discussed in Part 7.

## **5.1 Legal and neutral**

### **5.1.1 Klubovna**

*Klubovna* is a non-commercial independent student club operated using D.I.Y. principles, located in a municipally owned building of a former nursery on Generála Píky Street in Dejvice neighborhood, Prague 6. The club is operated by a student civil group *Povaleč*, which managed to gain the right to use the old derelict building of the former nursery in a selection procedure launched by the Municipality of Prague 6. Its visitors are young people, predominantly students and the program is focused on youth music, art, theatre, film screenings, workshops, flea markets etc. Despite the club's obvious benefits for the local youth community, the approach of the Municipality of Prague 6 towards the project is very biased. *Klubovna* is under a constant threat of demolition due to a planned road construction.

- **Property:** The building of *Klubovna* had served as a nursery in the 1950s but had gone out of use for several years in contemporary times. The empty building, along with its own garden, is conveniently situated in close proximity to the Technical College campus and the metro stop, Dejvická. For several years it has been meant to be torn down due to planned road constructions, but the construction kept being postponed and the building persisted. Its insecure destiny later proved to be both an advantage and a disadvantage; if the building was not planned to be demolished, the *Povaleč* group probably would not have



had a chance to use it, on the other hand the planned demolition has constituted a constant threat and insecurity for the future operation of *Klubovna*.

**Figure 6:** The building of *Klubovna* in winter



Source: klubovna.povalec.cz

- **Users of the space:** *Klubovna* is operated by the civil group *Povaleč*, which is composed of a group of old friends from Prague who had previously used the building as a clubroom as part of their membership in a local youth organization. *Klubovna* is just an extension of the civil group's cultural activities, which are dominated by an independent cultural festival called *Povaleč* that has been annually held in the small picturesque town of Valeč in western Bohemia, since the year 2006. The *Povaleč* group wanted to be more involved in organizing cultural events throughout the whole year and therefore, decided to open an independent cultural center in Prague, targeted mainly towards university students and young people from the neighborhood.
- **Provider and conditions:** The building of *Klubovna* is a municipally owned property under the administration of the city district of Prague 6. In 2008, the civil organization started to negotiate with the local authorities. At first, the attitude of the local authorities was disapproving and apprehensive, but the project was supported by a few councilors in the cultural division; one of them

being Martin Skalský, a former member of the *Medáks'* squat project in Střešovice (see Box 13.). Skalský, alongside two other councilors, supported the project of a cultural center, while other members of the council were against it. When the civil group *Povaleč* showed interest in the former nursery, the local city hall launched a selection procedure in order to select the best project for the building. The civil group *Povaleč* prepared a highly elaborate project for a non-profit cultural center, whose target demographic was principally university students. The project was accompanied by documents of support from the Student Unions of Charles University, and the Technical College. The only competing project was a sculptural studio.

In the end, the *Povaleč* group won their right to use the property with indeterminate duration; in other words the building was provided only until its demolition was necessary for road construction. According to the lease contract, the *Povaleč* group was bound to restore the building using their own financial resources, keeping the building in a condition that would not harm the reputation of benefactor (the city district of Prague 6), and all cultural production that exceeds common noise levels was supposed to be terminated by 10 p.m. The lease was provided for a symbolic price of 50 CZK per square meter per year, which is 8,600 CZK (cca 400 USD) for the entire property each year. The contract also included a stipulation according to which the benefactor had no right to demand any kind of compensation after the termination of the contract.

- **Surroundings:** Prague 6 is a quiet city district, reputed for being a traditional and slightly upscale residential zone. It also hosts the Technical College and university dormitories. Before the creation of *Klubovna*, the area had no youth center except for *Klub 007 Strahov*, which is slightly sideways on the Strahov hill. Local authorities perceived the idea of an alternative cultural center as a noisy and potentially dangerous disruption to the quiet character of the area.
- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** The aim of the group was to create an alternative low profile meeting center for young people and university students, a co-operative venue with a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, and a rich cultural program that mainly evolves around theatre and music production of young and amateur ensembles, as well as

around screenings, lectures, sports games, board games, etc. Since May 2009, the *Povaleč* group has been a regular leaseholder with the right to use the derelict property in urgent need of repairs. In November 2009, they were able to open the space to the public and start launching various cultural programs. The center soon gained its reputation among students and local youth, but also among people from all over Prague. However, during the interview held in spring 2011, the organizers were still facing numerous obstacles with the building's physical condition, various permits, etc.

**Figure 7.** *Klubovna's interior*



Source: klubovna.povalec.cz

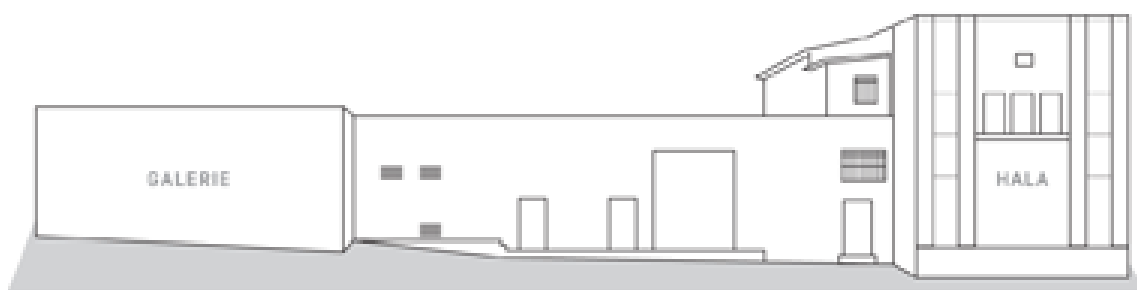
- **Financial support:** Except for a small cultural grant from the local authorities, the *Klubovna* project had no financial support from the public resources; the *Povaleč* group, composed of university students without any regular wages, had to support the building repairs with their own savings, and later on with money earned at an improvised bar.
- **Conclusion:** Despite being a group of financially not very well-off university students, the civil group *Povaleč* displayed unusual persistence, enthusiasm,

and industriousness in pursuing their cultural activities. The assistance of the local authorities has on the other hand proven very poor. According to the latest information, the building *Klubovna* is fully approved, and despite the animosity of the local authorities enjoys increasing popularity among the youth. However, the threat of the demolition persists, as do the financial challenges related to the operating costs.

### **5.1.2 *Třafačka***

*Třafačka* is an alternative cultural and art center, with gallery spaces and art studios, established by a group of artists in a dilapidated former electrical transformer station on Kurta Konráda Street in Libeň neighbourhood, Prague 9. The space consists of a showroom called *Galerie Třafačka*, and a big industrial hall suitable for large-scale art pieces, as well as occasional cultural events, such as concerts, performances, festivals, and fashion shows.

**Figure 8.** Plan of *Třafačka*



Source: [trafačka.net/](http://trafačka.net/)

*Třafačka* is a place that professes D.I.Y. principles, and provides a space where both local and foreign fans of contemporary art can meet, discuss and create, as well as follow and establish the latest trends in art. The predominantly young artists in *Třafačka* are focused on graffiti, street art, and conceptual art. Some of them have already gained international reputations. *Třafačka* has been provided to the artists due to its owners', a private property investment company, inability to find investors for the plot underneath the building which has long been planned for demolition. While the future of *Třafačka* remains insecure, another building with bright new art studios has been built by the investment company for some of the most



prominent artists from *Třafačka*.

**Figure 9.** Former electrical transformer station covered by graffiti



Source: wikimedia.org

- **Property:** The building is a former electrical transformer station only 5 kilometers from downtown Prague in an area that is relatively accessible by public transit. The property belongs to the *PSN (Pražská Správa Nemovitostí)*, a Prague based company engaged with property investments and property management. The company is owned by a bankrupt banker and businessman, Václav Skala, who is infamous for using extensive asset-stripping practices. In the past, Skala's practices led to huge financial losses for the Czech National Bank. The burnt-out and crumbling building of the station consists of two spacious cement halls which share a common backyard with an adjacent tenement corner house. Both buildings are in a serious state of disrepair, awaiting new investment opportunity and a better situation on the real estate market. While the property is in desperate need of repairs, it is undergoing a

time-gap with an indefinite end, as its owner cannot use it for commercial purposes.

When *Trafačka* started to be used by artists, the adjacent tenement house was still inhabited by a number of remaining tenants, including a few families, predominantly low income Roma people. Due to the planned demolition, the PSN stopped renewing occupational leases and tenants were gradually being displaced, in most cases getting only a small financial compensation. In 2008, the artists expanded their workspaces into the humid, moldy and disintegrating apartments in the neighboring tenement house. Since 2011 the artists are also using the premises of *Trafačka 2*, which is in a former laundrette on Čerpadlová Street.

- **Users of the space:** *Trafačka* is operated by a civil group called “o.s. *Trafačka*”<sup>36</sup>, which is composed of the art manager, Blanka Čermáková, and artists Jan Kaláb, Jakub Nepraš, Michal Cimala, Martin Kaňa, and formerly Roman Týc. None of the artists had previously intended to start a large art project, but in 2006, Kaláb was coincidentally given an opportunity to use the huge premises of the transformer station. Other artists joined him, and with the support of their friends restored the building, predominantly by means of their own private money. The group opened a few studios, established a gallery, and launched an exhibition program. Blanka Čermáková, a curator and a fundraiser at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, has been in charge of *Trafačka*’s finance, cultural program, and fundraising.

Since 2008, approximately twenty individual artists - the so-called art residents - started to use the free apartments in the neighboring tenement house as studios. The artists in *Trafačka* constitute a relatively coherent group of rather individualistic artists, who are engaging in very different forms of art, which, for the most part, can be regarded as alternative, contemporary and unconventional. Even though these people do not pursue any type of communitarian lifestyle and use the premises of *Trafačka* predominantly for work, they constitute an interesting social group surrounded and followed by a specific community of various creative individuals and other artists. Exhibitions and occasional cultural events hosted by *Trafačka* are typically

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<sup>36</sup> The name *Trafačka* is related to Trafo, which is a Czech company that produces transformers.

open to the public, but they occasionally have a semi-private ambiance when the regular crowd attends them. Various parties with live music or barbeques in the backyard etc. can occasionally be private. However, the tenants in *Třafačka* are not constant; they occasionally change, which adds up to the variability and diversity of events, both public and private, that take place in *Třafačka*.

- **Provider and conditions:** The first contact between the artists and the *PSN* took place when Mrs. Malá, the wife of the *PSN*'s executive head Mr. Malý, commissioned Jan Kaláb to paint a wall of a dilapidated former electrical transformer station. He made a graffiti of the name of an NGO called "SOS 18"<sup>37</sup>, an organization that helps eighteen-year old teenagers on their transition from crèches to independent adult lives. Kaláb was able to leave his paints and tools inside the burnt out building. Subsequently, Mr. and Mrs. Malý offered Kaláb use of the building to conduct his art work for the period of one year, with a possibility of renewing the lease on the basis of future development plans with the building, and on the basis of the real estate market situation. Once the art center was established, the lease kept getting annually extended, always by another year.

When the *PSN* provided the apartments in the adjacent tenement house in 2008, the company retained control over the premises planned for demolition by leasing them for a period of only six months. The studios were in a state of disrepair, the rents paid for them very low. According to Čermáková, *Třafačka* provides by far the cheapest artist workspaces in the city.

Since the artists in *Třafačka* exist under a constant threat of displacement, the *PSN* executive Mr. Malý decided to provide the most successful members of *Třafačka* collective with a new art space, where the artists don't have to worry about an insecure future and unsuitable conditions. Mr. Malý therefore decided to build, at his own expense, luxurious art studios and a gallery in a former launderette only two tram stops away from *Třafačka*. Part of the core members of *Třafačka* have used this space, called *Třafačka 2*, since 2011, paying only utilities and no rent. Kaláb, who uses one of the studios in the new building, believes that Mr. Malý provided the artists with a restored building not out of philanthropy, but rather as a way of investing his

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.sos18.cz/>

money.

**Figure 10.** Newly redeveloped art studios of *Trafačka 2*



Photo: Author

- **Surroundings:** Always covered by constantly renewed graffiti, the building of *Trafačka* by far declassifies the gloomy and tedious surroundings of the slowly gentrifying working class neighborhood of Libeň, one of the boroughs of the Prague 9 district which, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, used to be one of Prague's industrial centers. The social status of the local population is relatively low and is inhabited by socially disadvantaged groups, such as immigrant workers, working class people, elders, and Roma population. Most of the local estates are 19<sup>th</sup> century residential buildings, out of which many are in a state of disrepair and underinvestment. Due to this fact, Libeň has long had a reputation as a dangerous area. *Trafačka* is in close proximity of multiple railways, a busy expressway, and a few highway bridges. The location is noisy, dusty and far from greenery.

During the past few years, the area has been upgraded and sanitized through uncoordinated development of various new buildings. A gigantic shopping and administrative center called *Galerie Harfa* was built over the lot



in front of *Třafačka* in 2010, while east of the mall we can find the hugely controversial multi-purpose *O2 Arena*<sup>38</sup>. One block away from the western side of *Třafačka* the development company *Orco Property Group* built over a park, constructing an office building called *Vysočanská Brána*, which now belongs to another development and construction company, *Skanska Property*.<sup>39</sup> Most of the new buildings in close proximity to *Třafačka* epitomize the materialization of speculative investments and their overall layout disrupts the notion of a well thought-out livable and pedestrian friendly city.

- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** Despite its insecure future and rough conditions, artists worked every day to bring the building back to life. Within a short time, the *Třafačka* project became well known among Prague's art scene, which grew fond of its industrial premises, its decadence, free spirit and unlimited options in terms of the size of artwork, visitors' capacity, etc. During occasional exhibitions and art events held on its premises, *Třafačka* works as the only motive that draws people from the entire city (from outside of the city too) to the unattractive Libeň neighborhood.

Since its opening in 2006, *Třafačka* has hosted dozens of art and cultural events. Some of the events were of significant importance and of an international scale, e.g. the international inter-media festival of installation, performance and sound art called *Echofluxx*, or the first international street-art festival held in Czechia called *Names*, which was held in *Třafačka* in 2008. The range of events that have been organized or hosted by *Třafačka* during the past six years is significant. Besides the international festivals mentioned above, the premises have also been used for an annual art event called *Pod Čarou (Under the Line)*, an exhibition of artwork by students that were not accepted by an art school. Occasionally, the building is used for decentralized programs within various citywide events which are not organized by the *Třafačka* collective, such as *Designblok* - an annual festival of design, or *Prague Quadrennial* - an International Competitive Exhibition of Scenography and Theater Architecture. In cooperation with the NGO *SOS 18*, *Třafačka*

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<sup>38</sup> Its construction resulted in the bankruptcy of its main investor, a Czech betting company *Sazka a.s.*

<sup>39</sup> Due to financial problems, *Orco* had to sell this building for a price that was 1.16 million EUR lower than its estimated value. At the time of the conduct of this research, only a few offices in this building were leased out.

collective has also organized several painting workshops for children who live without parents. So far the collective has resisted commercial offers and predominantly provides the premises of *Třafačka* to people who are directly involved with the collective, and occasionally for non-profit purposes, e.g. for an after-party held after a petition march organized by students who were lobbying for the reconstruction of a dilapidating building housing the historical cinema theatre, *Svět*.

- **Financial support:** The program and operational costs of the gallery in *Třafačka* are supported by grants from the Ministry of Culture, from Prague's Municipality, and partly from the cultural budget of the city district of Prague 9. Occasionally the space is leased out for cultural events with external organizations, however, not for commercial purposes. The main financial challenge is represented by a lack of resources for restoring the physical condition of the building. If the building is not demolished and sponsors are not found, the physical condition of the building might potentially become dangerous to its users.
- **Conclusion:** *Třafačka* is an example of a case where the long-term cooperation of a private investment company with alternative non-profit interests turned into a fascinating cultural project that constitutes a nice and useful addition to the local disconsolate neighbourhood, while also assisting the private interests of the owner of the property. At present, *Třafačka* collective uses two different properties, both provided by the same company. While the new one is cheaply provided to the most talented members of the collective for a long-term period, the old one with the remaining artists, and host to all the cultural events held for the public, is still under threat of demolition.

### **5.1.3 Hala C**

*Hala C* was an industrial space on Drahobejlova Street in Libeň neighborhood, Prague 9, which served cultural purposes between the years 2007 – 2010. The cultural events were organized by a civil group called *Kultura Jinak (Culture another Way)* which thanks to personal connections, obtained permission to use the industrial space from a development

company. The space was only several hundred meters away from *Třafačka* and the two collectives occasionally cooperated.

- **Property:** *Hala C* was located in a huge industrial space of approximately 700 square meters, which had previously served technical maintenance for automotive trucks and was meant for redevelopment.
- **Users of the space:** The civil group *Kultura Jinak* had been established prior to discovering *Hala C*, and already had previous experience with organizing various cultural events in uncommon spaces. The organization was first founded by a different collective in 2001 for the purposes of managing a bar at *MeetFactory* (see chapter n. 5.2.1), but the original founders eventually stopped being active and decided to transfer the whole organization to a new collective – Linda Šilingerová, Omri Goz and Tereza Matyska Mičanková. The main mission of the renewed *Kultura Jinak* group was to support young unprofessional artists and musicians of different genres, and to organize noncommercial cultural events in an uncommon way and in unusual settings. Before the *Kultura Jinak* collective managed to find *Hala C*, they organized several events in *Třafačka* as well as a few other spaces.
- **Provider and conditions:** The development company that provided the space of *Hala C* was *Sen Development*; its owner Eugen Roden happened to be father of Daniel Roden, a friend who was helping the collective with their activities. *Hala C* was part of the *Balabenka Point* complex in Libeň owned by the company. The collective and the *Sen Development* settled on a symbolic monthly rent of 1,000 CZK (cca 50 USD) on the condition that the collective would immediately vacate the premises in case of a sudden development opportunity. Despite the personal connection, the collective had to face constant insecurity and the threat of future redevelopment throughout their stay in *Hala C*. In the end, they were able to use the building for three years:
- **Surroundings:** *Hala C* used to be only a few steps from *Třafačka* (see p. 111), although slightly further from the busy roads and railways.
- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** During the three years in *Hala C*, the members of the *Kultura Jinak* collective had to deal with various obstacles connected to the temporal and insecure conditions of their lease. They devoted a lot of their free time to organizing and running

the program while keeping their daily jobs to be able to sustain their lives. Because of the insecure future they couldn't ensure acoustic insulation or build a bathroom for the visitors, instead using portable ones. Despite the difficulties, the cultural program in *Hala C* was rich, involving various concerts, parties, workshops, theatre, performances, exhibitions, flea markets etc. *Hala C* became popular among visitors throughout the city of Prague, but also from the close surroundings. People's interest in the industrial premises only proves the fact that an increasing number of people are bored of stereotypical and predictable environment of conventional clubs:

*"People who came there were like 'wow, this is a great space, it is so heterogeneous'. It is not an enclosed club where you are not allowed to go anywhere, where you are watched by security guards. It is a free space" ... "I really like these spaces, they used to serve something completely different and I like giving them a new sense. I organized events in Vítkov, sewage plants... The building does not have to deteriorate; you can use it for something else. It has got its own atmosphere and you can work with it, with the light, with the installations. And you are not tied up by any institution" (Omri Goz, Hala C).*

**Figure 11.** *Buy Nothing Day at Hala C*



Photo: Author

- **Financial support:** The *Kultura Jinak* collective managed to receive a financial grant from Prague's Municipality – 160,000 CZK (cca 7,850 USD)

for the first year, and 130,000 CZK (cca 6,370 USD) for the second year. They were also given a smaller grant from the city district of Prague 9, but according to the collective this municipal financial support was just enough to cover operational costs. Aside from that, the project was financed from money earned at the bar and from entrance fees. A few times the collective provided the premises of *Hala C* for private purposes, e.g. for filming, or for a private party of the landlord, Mr. Eugen Roden.

- **Conclusion:** *Hala C* was a typical case of a cultural project whose establishment was possible only thanks to personal relations between actors in cultural production and actors in development. For a short period of three years, *Hala C* constituted a lively point for culture and socializing, which alongside *Třafačka*, was enlivening the gloomy surroundings of Libeň neighborhood, an area which otherwise does not have any experimental projects or cultural centers for the youth. *Hala C* had the potential to transform into a meeting place for the local community and to increase local residents' self-identification with the neighborhood, as well as to enrich the local cultural offer. Despite their personal relations and the success of their project, the *Kultura Jinak* collective finally had to buckle under the commercial interests of the owner.

#### **5.1.4 Karlín Studios**

*Karlín Studios* is an art center established in another industrial space, this time in Křižikova Street in Karlín neighborhood in Prague 8. It was established by the artist Jiří David out of a pressing need to find a new art studio, and restored in cooperation with Alberto di Stefano, an Italian architect and restaurateur based in Prague, and a big supporter of art and the owner of the *Futura* gallery in Prague 5. The space is leased out by the development company *Karlín Real Estate Group* (KREG further in the text), which is planning to redevelop the building in the future. Currently the space contains two galleries, several art studios, and a few other cultural projects.

**Figure 12.** *Karlín Studios* and its surroundings



Photo: Author

- **Property:** At the beginning of the project, the building now housing *Karlín Studios* was abandoned and dilapidated. It is situated in a former working-class neighborhood in Prague 8, which was severely affected by floods in summer 2002. The 3000 square meter building is one of the last remains of the original factory complex of *ČKD*, a former engineering company founded during the Austrian-Hungarian era, whose premises have been contemporarily owned and gradually redeveloped by the *KREG*. To be able to serve cultural purposes, the building was in urgent need of restoration.
- **Users of the space:** At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century several artists had to leave their studios located in a building in Wenceslas Square after an Irish investment group had purchased it. One of those displaced, the prominent Czech artist Jiří David, started to look for a suitable new space. He asked for the help of Alberto di Stefano, whose development company specializes at restoring brownfield areas and historical buildings. At that time Alberto knew about no suitable space, but suggested that they should look for a space that could be used for a bigger synergic project where several artists could use the



workspace together. Thanks to his many connections, in 2005 Jiří David came across an opportunity to use an old derelict building. Alberto di Stefano then also became involved in the project and together they founded a civil organization called *Karlín Studios*; one of the members of the group was also Alberto's gallery called *Futura*.

**Figure 13.** Contrasting worlds – office spaces (right) and *Karlín Studios* (left)



Photo: Author

- **Provider and conditions:** The *KREG*, represented by one of the co-owners of the development company, Charles A. Butler, offered Jiří David to use the building as an art studio. Butler claimed that during the next five years the company had no intention to redevelop the space, and the artists could use it. The very first contract between *Karlín Studios* and the *KREG* was therefore for a period of 5 years, which was in 2010 prolonged by another three years. The project is never able to plan ahead, and always has to take into account a very uncertain future. Contemporarily, there is a possibility that the contract might get prolonged in 2013 again, if the economic crisis persists. Artists in *Karlín Studios* benefit from the possibility of being able to pay two thirds of their rent in art pieces; every year Mr. Butler comes to the studios and picks a few art pieces. According to the contract, art pieces must be collected from each artist,

including the artists who create “immaterial” art, such as videos.

- **Surroundings:** *Karlín Studios* is located in a relatively central area of the city. It takes only a few minutes to get to the historical core of Prague by tram or by metro. The whole Karlín neighborhood, previously a working-class neighborhood full of industrial architecture and dilapidated residential buildings, has been undergoing dynamic gentrification since the floods in summer 2002. The *KREG* has been redeveloping parts of the former *ČKD* factory, which *Karlín Studios* is part of. As a result, the building itself is surrounded by new modern office buildings. The area has also recently become more popular for residential purposes. However, it currently has almost no cultural centers, galleries, or other places for entertainment.
- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** The purpose of *Karlín Studios* was to create a non-profit experimental project for talented artists of different generations. It was meant to serve as art studios as well as a gallery space, and a space for various experimental activities, artists’ residencies, etc. According to Alberto di Stefano it was important to make an inter-generational project in order to facilitate cooperation between artists of different age, as well as to attract a wider scope of people. Gallery spaces were not meant to serve only those people who were renting workspaces in *Karlín Studios*, but also various artists outside of *Karlín Studios*. In the beginning *Karlín Studios* was meant to function independently of the *Futura* gallery, but the project’s exhibition program was not very well coordinated; due to the limited budget during the initial months, artists had to organize exhibitions on their own, proving to be quite unsuccessful, mainly due to the lack of experience some of the young artists had in terms of organizing, installing and promoting their own art shows. Eventually, the team involved in the *Futura* gallery started to take care of the program in *Karlín Studios* in order to make it professionally organized and well promoted. Independently of the *Futura* gallery, three young female artists and curators started to take care of the gallery space in the entrance hall, which is called *Entrance* gallery, and mostly reserved for exhibiting the work of young artists. For a short period of time *Karlín Studios* also housed *Divus*, a publisher specializing in art and culture. It is also home to the artists’ database of Ludvík Hlaváček’s *Foundation of the*



*Contemporary Art.* Part of the project has also provided working space for foreign artists who come to Prague for an artist residency exchange. Occasionally, the space is provided for other, predominantly non-profit purposes.

**Figure 14.** Political exhibition called *Whose city is this?* in *Karlín Studios*



Photo: Author

- **Financial support:** The restoration of the dilapidated building was secured and financially subsidized by Alberto di Stefano, who used his private savings. However, his budget was limited, making the restoration fairly complicated:

*“It (the building) was in bad condition, but I had some money left at that time, but it was not so much. I put 2 million CZK (almost 100,000 USD) into the reconstruction, and to reconstruct 3000 square meters with 2 million CZK is not an easy operation, but we tried to do the maximum. We cleaned all the mess, but we also left many original things. I paid for it out of my own pocket, I thought something nice might be happening there.... The same reason why I bought the Futura gallery 2 years before – out of my personal enthusiasm. The space was destroyed by the flood; car manufacturing was over after the War, then it was probably used as a storage” (Alberto di Stefano).*

Apart from the private investment, *Karlín Studios* is supported thru grants from the Ministry of Culture and from the Municipality. However, the amount of

money differs drastically every year, which complicates any kind of planning process. Some finances are also provided by foreign embassies, e.g. in cases where foreign artist are involved in exchange residency programs. Curiously, such residencies are not supported by the Czech Ministry of Culture.<sup>40</sup> *Karlín Studios* have never managed to get a sponsorship from the city district of Prague 8.

**Figure 15.** Hallway in *Karlín Studios*



Photo: Author

- **Conclusion:** *Karlín Studios* constitutes a relatively affordable option for artists in need of spacious and easily accessible workspaces, as well as a great exhibition space both close to the city center, and filling a hole in an area with a predominance of office spaces. The owner of the property benefits from the artists' presence thanks to their willingness to invest into a dilapidated property which might otherwise disturb the users of the surrounding office buildings. The *KREG* is currently facing financial problems related to the economic crisis, and recently has started reducing its property. The future of *Karlín*

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<sup>40</sup> According to the project manager of the *Futura* gallery, Ondřej Stupal, the residency program is very important for the intercultural exchange between artists, but the Ministry of Culture only provides financial support to Czech artists who are going abroad and not the other way round. It also does not allow the applicants to apply for financial support for residencies via agencies.

*Studios* is very insecure despite the fact that the area urgently needs a center for culture and arts.

### **5.1.5 Cross Club**

*Cross Club* represents Prague's popular alternative club, which over years has managed to turn into the most uniquely decorated subcultural melting pot. It is located at the junction of the Argentinská and Plynární streets, in Holešovice neighborhood, Prague 7. *Cross Club* is not just a club; in less than a decade it has grown into a project that takes up an entire corner house, and fills it up with vibrant cultural life, a wide range of young visitors, and increasingly, with foreigners and tourists. *Cross Club* is certainly one of the most unique and interesting alternative projects in the city. Its authentic and free-spirited atmosphere is created by the omnipresent spirit of grassroots and D.I.Y. principles, as well as its rich cultural program, which can satisfy a whole range of non-mainstream tastes. *Cross Club* is a place that enables mixing of various subcultures, music of different genres, as well as theatre, lectures, screenings, workshops, and many others. As regards the relationship of the club and the owner of the building, *Cross Club* in fact does not truly deviate from standard market relations, as it exists under a usual lease contract and is subject to a normal market rent which has to be paid for the entire building to the building's private owner. However, it hasn't always been that way. The project is certainly alternative, as is the way the whole project came into being.

- **Property:** Only steps from the metro stop Nádraží Holešovice in Holešovice neighborhood, it is hard to overlook a residential corner building from the beginning of the last century that has an unusual eccentric metallic statue on its side. The statue verges into a metallic structure forming a pleasant multi-storey beer garden behind the building. From the garden, two different entrances lead into the house. The house is in good condition, but the previous tenants, who used them as railway offices, demolished the interiors. The house is located on a busy junction and suffers from heavy traffic. The club inside the building currently contains two floors with stages and bars, one floor with a café and a small screening room, and other floors full of art studios, rehearsal rooms, a theatre, and the *radio23* station. Part of the building also serves as rooms and apartments for employees of the club. All rooms are connected with the rest of



the space, and the club reminds of a complicated network of various corridors, cubbies and corners

**Figure 16.** Metalic beer garden in *Cross Club*



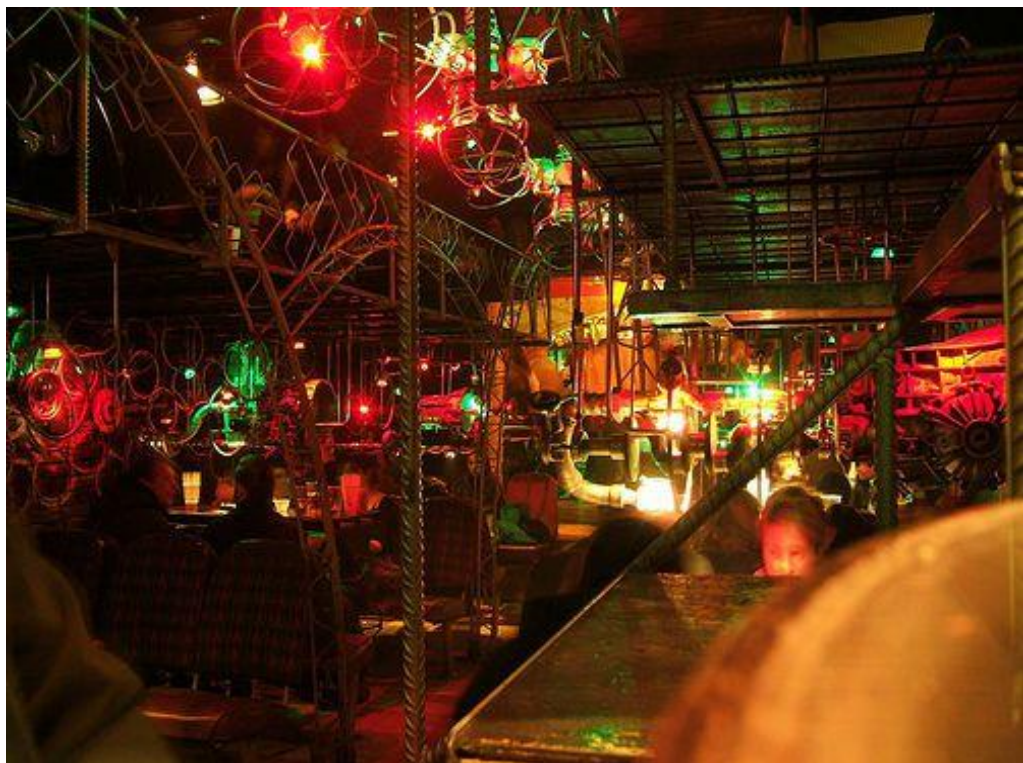
Source: prague-guide.eu

- **Users of the space:** One of the main personas in the club's existence has been František Chmelík, who was originally renting just a small part of the underused corner house for his printing office. Chmelík had no ambition to run a club, but when his friends started to hang out in his printing office, Chmelík started to run a tearoom for his friends in the basement. The tearoom soon gained popularity among a growing number of people and spontaneously started to turn into a club, eventually taking over the whole building. Simultaneously, Chmelík was gradually decorating the premises of *Cross Club* with various objects found in scrap yards, turning them into sculptures that move and glow. Nowadays, the decorations are one of the main assets of *Cross Club*, attracting many curious visitors, including tourists.

Regarding the actual existence and functioning of *Cross Club*, the key person is Tomáš Kenzo Zdeněk, one of Chmelík's friends. Alongside other people, *Kenzo* founded the civil group *All art* in 2006, which he later replaced

with another civil organization called *Paradox* in 2007, with the aim of supporting and creating alternative culture in Prague. The civil group actively enriches the cultural program in *Cross Club*, which now includes various lectures, film screenings, theatre, or art exhibitions. Apart from the regular members of the collective that evolved around Chmelík, *Cross Club* also hires various workers, such as bartenders, security guards, and other people who help with running the club.

**Figure 17.** Unique interiors of *Cross Club*



Source: gogobot.com

- **Provider and conditions:** At the beginning of the project, the house was owned by an old man who had restituted the building, which used to belong to his family until the end of the Second World War. After the restitution he was unsuccessful in selling the property, which had been built by his father – the famous architect Fialka, almost a century ago. The owner was glad when Chmelík started doing business in his building. In the end, Chmelík was able to use almost the entire building at a very reasonable price. The contract changed in 2007, after the owner of the house died leaving the house to his son, who decided to rent it out for market rent, which was considerably higher. Luckily

this change took place when *Cross Club* was experiencing its boom in terms of the attendance and popularity, and was able to afford to pay the fairly high price. Also, due to the commercial relationship between the owner and the renters, the physical state of the building became the responsibility of the owner.

- **Surroundings:** *Cross Club* is located in a former working-class neighborhood with many industrial buildings and river docks. Part of the neighborhood is already gentrified. The club is located right next to a big road junction with heavy traffic and a railway station which is traditionally occupied by a high number of homeless people and drug-users. The locality is quite convenient, as it is only steps from the metro station and from a bus stop with night buses. Also, the only direct neighbor of the house is paradoxically a local station of the metropolitan police.
- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** The club which was born out of a coincidence eventually turned into one of the most important alternative hubs in the city. The cultural program has an unusual ability to fit the tastes of all kinds of people and one of the most unique aspects of the club is its ability to connect people from very distant subcultures, social groups, etc. On a daily basis, a wide range of alternative individuals, out of which some are rarely seen sharing the same space, visit the club. Sometimes stages on different floors are dedicated to very different genres of music, e.g. psytrance and punk rock. Adherents of different subcultures, which would hardly ever come across each other normally, are given the opportunity to interact.
- **Financial support:** The profits of the club are usually high enough to cover the rent, basic repairs, reconstructions, or new decorations, as well as the salaries of the people who work at *Cross Club*. Nonetheless, the club is continually facing financial problems. Occasionally, the club accepts various minor commercial offers, and provides its premises for photo and film shootings, release parties etc. Apart from its own revenue, *Cross Club* is also subsidized by grants from the Municipality and the Ministry of Culture. In 2012, *Cross Club* received 600,000 CZK (almost 30,000 USD) of public money altogether.

*Kenzo* says that the main challenge is to stay motivated and to retain the alternative nature and identity of the club, despite commercial pressures and a constant lack of financial resources. Some months are not profitable for the club. Even the commercial offers the club accepts are carefully chosen so as not to destroy the club's identity and reputation. Many commercial offers therefore get turned down. The most important rule is not to threaten the regular program of the club. However, if the commercial interests of some members of *Cross Club* collective prevail, the club might take a wrong direction and lose its free-spirited alternativeness.

- **Evaluation:** *Cross Club* is an illustrative example of an alternative space whose creation was enabled by a mutually beneficial barter between a private owner and actors in alternative culture. Unfortunately, contemporarily the same club is illustrative of the pressures that legal alternative projects have to face while trying to avoid their own ceasing under commercial pressures. The club has gained citywide importance and popularity, but it still faces financial insecurity, which was especially pronounced in the beginning of the global economic crisis when attendance and revenues dropped significantly. The club's alternative spirit largely depends on the personnel responsible for its management.

## 5.2 Legal and incorporated

### 5.2.1 *MeetFactory*

*MeetFactory* is an international center for contemporary art situated in an old industrial building on Ke Sklárně Street in Smíchov neighborhood, Prague 5. The huge project was founded by the famous sculptor, David Černý, and its program enjoys extensive financial support from the Municipality of Prague. It consists of two galleries, two multifunctional auditoriums, studios, rehearsal rooms, foyers, and facilities for residents and other spaces, together occupying 5100 meters square of floor area. *MeetFactory* was most likely the first project in Prague that embraced the idea of turning old industrial buildings into centers for culture and art. Despite the favor of the local authorities, it still faces an insecure future,



mainly due to planned redevelopment in the adjacent area. The space also faces a lack of investment finances; in order to secure finances for repairs, *MeetFactory* is increasingly leaning towards its use for commercial purposes.

**Figure 18.** Railways in front of *MeetFactory*



Source: meetfactory.cz

- **Property:** *MeetFactory* has been located in two different locations during its history – each time in an industrial building. From 2001 it was shortly occupying an industrial building on Osadní Street in Holešovice neighborhood, Prague 7. The building had formerly served for meet production, hence the current name of the project, *MeetFactory*, refers to the project's history as well as to its intended purpose, which is socializing of people who produce and support contemporary culture and art. However, in summer 2002, the building in Holešovice was flooded and *MeetFactory* had to be relocated. Since 2005 it has been using another industrial building, a former glass-factory located in the industrial part of Smíchov neighborhood. The building itself used to shortly serve as a shelter during the construction of the neighboring highway, and several years after the highway's completion remained abandoned and used by



homeless people.

**Figure 19.** Mural on *MeetFactory* building



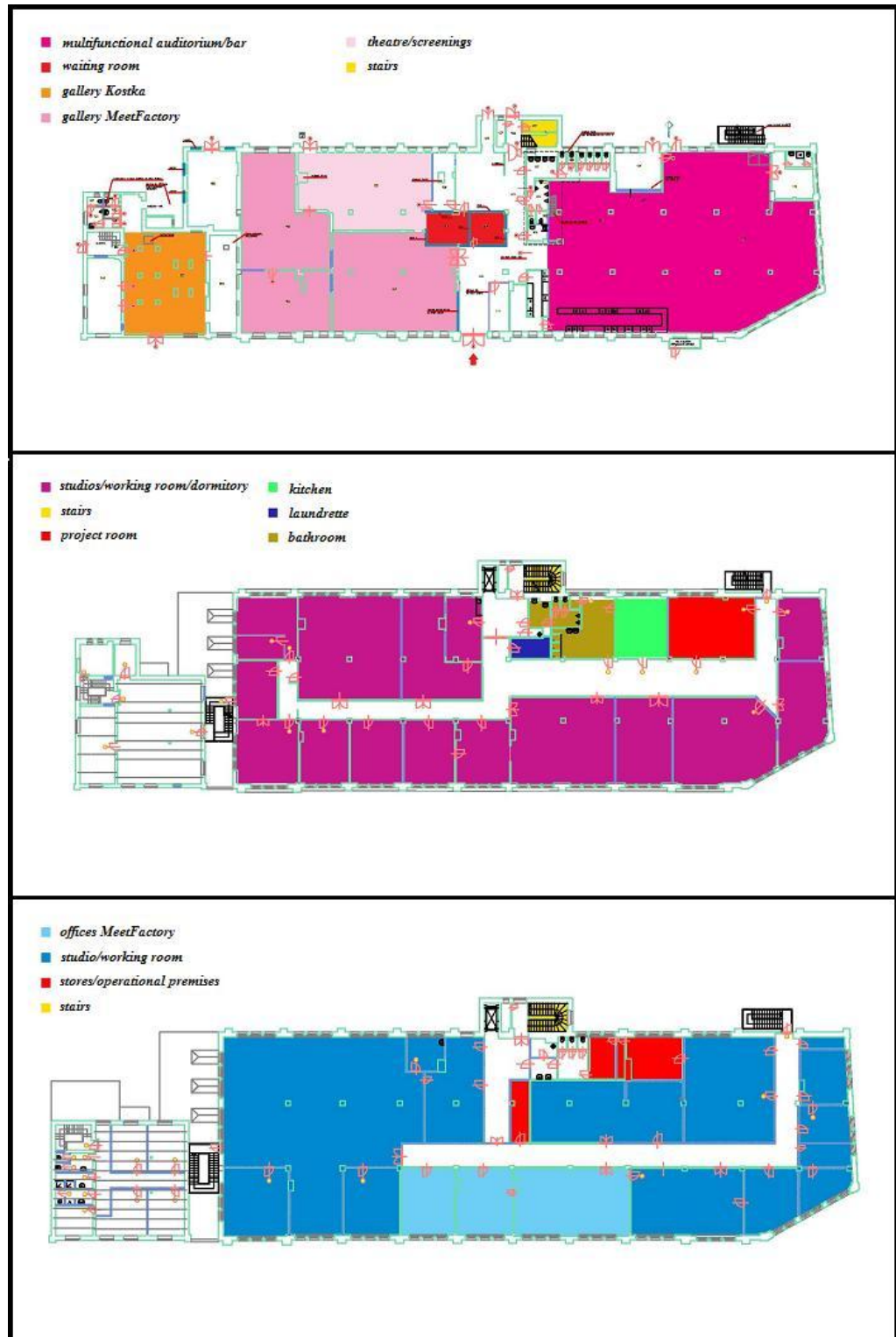
Source: meetfactory.cz

- **Users of the space:** *MeetFactory* started as a public benefit corporation founded by David Černý, one of the most prominent and controversial Czech artists. Černý's idea was to create a free-spirited center of contemporary art and culture with an international outreach and ability to facilitate intercultural and international cooperation. Other members of the managing board of *MeetFactory*, include two other publicly known personalities; the musician David Koller, and the movie and theatre director Alice Nellis. A number of artists, musicians, and other creative people use the studios, working rooms and dormitory that belongs to the project.
- **Provider and conditions:** The very first building used by *MeetFactory* was provided by a private individual, who offered David Černý the opportunity to realize his project in the freshly restituted premises, in Holešovice neighborhood. After the floods in 2002, the project temporarily lacked property, until the Municipality of Prague offered to lease the building in Smíchov for a symbolic rent of 1 CZK (cca 0.04 USD). According to many opinions and rumors, such a generous offer from the Municipality was only

possible due to David Černý's connections and his close relationships with some of the top politicians on both a municipal and national level. Despite these alleged connections, the contract with the Municipality is not ideal. According to the contract, the artists are obliged to restore the derelict, significantly polluted, and virtually non-functional building, at their own expense. Neither was the contract between the Municipality and Černý's corporation *ad infinitum*; the very first contract, signed in 2005, was for five years, and was prolonged by another five years in 2010. Although it is a non-profit corporation, facing an insecure future due to the potential redevelopment of the surrounding area, *MeetFactory* has been obliged to secure finances to repair the huge building independently of the Municipality.

- **Surroundings:** *MeetFactory* is part of a brownfield area adjacent to the Smíchov railway station, and eight busy railways and a highway therefore surround the art center. The whole area is planned for future redevelopment. When *MeetFactory* opened to the public in 2007, visitors had to first get used to an unusual and not easily accessible location. According to Jindra Zemanová, the director of *MeetFactory* at the time of this research, people still perceive the location as the periphery despite the fact that it is easily reachable by tramway. The peripheral ambience is most likely due to the gloomy surroundings of the sparsely built-up de-industrialized brownfield. On top of that, the tramway stop is divided from *MeetFactory* by several still fully operational railways; trips to *MeetFactory* have therefore become notorious for being connected with undertaking either a long roundabout way from the tramway stop to the closest bridge over the railways, or a dangerous way across the railways. People tend to undertake the much shorter but highly dangerous way; surprisingly no accidents have been reported so far. One of the dramaturges is of the opinion that travelling to *MeetFactory* requires a time investment: “If you go to a gallery in the city center and you don't like it, you can leave and go to a pub instead. You don't have that option if you go to *MeetFactory*” (Jan Horák, *MeetFactory*). On the other hand, those who work in *MeetFactory* see the location and the distance from the city center as convenient; far enough not to disturb anyone, and still close enough to get to within a few minutes by a tramway.

**Figure 20.** Plan of *MeetFactory*



Source: meetfactory.cz

- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** In spite of its geographical limitations, *MeetFactory* soon gained significant popularity among predominantly young people from all over Prague. From the very start

the project has been unique for its multilayered program, which combines art, theatre, film, music, and artists' residencies. The role of contemporary art and art residencies clearly prevails. Each year *MeetFactory* also hosts several artists from abroad, whose role is important in enriching the local art scene with new influences. *MeetFactory* also became a popular space for concerts and music festivals. Jindra Zemanová claims that the theatre and film screenings in *MeetFactory* occasionally attract even older generations. Occasionally, *MeetFactory* organizes charitable events, such as a children's celebration of Mikuláš (St. Nicolas holiday).

However, according to many interviewees, the project is being run increasingly in a commercial way. Petr Krůša, an actor and artist who shortly resided in *MeetFactory*, holds that the managing board of *MeetFactory* tends to become gradually more open to the commercial sphere and to provide its premises for projects that have very little in common with alternative culture. Meanwhile, they charge rents that are unaffordable to young musicians playing fresh experimental music, but are not yet known among wider audiences. *MeetFactory's* theatre dramaturgist Jan Horák also claimed that the intention of David Černý is to replace theatrical presentations with commercial musicals.

- **Financial support:** The *MeetFactory* program is financed through the profits of its own activities, by grants allocated by the Municipality, and the Ministry of Culture, which unfortunately can only allocate financial resources to separate dramaturgies, not to the whole project. Other subsidies come from partnerships with foreign cultural institutions, from public collections, and sponsorship donations. The project receives yearly subsidies of 5 million CZK (cca 243,000 USD) from the Municipality of Prague, which is several fold the amount allocated to comparable projects in Prague. All sources of income together allow the project an operational budget of approximately 10 to 12 million CZK per year (cca 486,000 to 584,000 USD). Owing to the size of the project, Jindra Zemanová claims that smooth operation would require a budget at least twice as large. *MeetFactory* therefore continually deals with a lack of resources. The project therefore faces the threat of conforming to various commercial purposes. Owing to the declared desire to remain fresh and progressive, *MeetFactory* has an image of a cool, young and trendy brand,

which many companies would like their products to be associated with. *MeetFactory* sometimes receives sponsorship in the form of various repairs or in the form of useful material; however, such sponsorship is usually not disinterested. That was e.g. the sponsorship provided by the Czech beer company *Budweiser Budvar*, or the automobile company *Citroen*, as described in Box 15.

### Box 15. *MeetFactory* and *Citroen*

In April 2010, *MeetFactory* was offered sponsorship and cooperation by the French automobile company *Citroen*. The company asked the artists in *MeetFactory* to create a new design for a new model of *Citroen* in exchange for the possibility to use two of the newly designed cars for a period of one year. Under the leadership of David Černý, the artists designed a motive of pouring pink juice, which then also appeared on the façade of the building of *MeetFactory*. The new model of *Citroen* was introduced inside *MeetFactory*, under the title *Šťáva českého umění* (*The Juice of Czech Art*); Zemanová said that the automobile company openly declared its interest in being connected with creativity and art, and *MeetFactory* served as the means towards this aim. Such a strategy is highly risky in terms of the cooptation of an alternative project by commercial interests. Despite Zemanová's proclamations that *MeetFactory* is not an automobile showroom (see p. 175), in March 2012 *MeetFactory* again served as a showroom, this time for a new model of motorcycle.

**Figure 21.** *MeetFactory* turning into an automobile showroom



Source: firemni-akce-event.cz

- **Conclusion:** The future of *MeetFactory* is highly insecure, although most likely not due to its demolition. The project probably won't cease due to lack of financial support either. Although the future of *MeetFactory* might be

significantly influenced by future development in the brownfield area of the adjacent railway station, the project is most threatened by the risk of losing alternativeness and becoming another well established constituent of the city's stagnating and backward cultural production which will neither remain attractive to young and creative people, nor constitute a progressive alternative to the cultural offer that the city already has at its disposition. Contrariwise, *MeetFactory* might contribute to the assimilation of Prague's alternative and progressive culture by market forces, assisting commercial interests. The fact that *MeetFactory* occasionally organizes charity events cannot make up for the project's gradual blending with the mainstream and commerce. If the managing board remains under the control of the same personal, the project will soon become a huge commercial project whose self-proclaimed alternativeness will become nothing but a marketing strategy.

### **5.2.2 Hala Thámova - Šípkárna**

Up until recently, we could find an old industrial hall on Pernerova Street in Libeň neighborhood, Prague 8. Just like the building of *Karlín Studios* (see chapter n. 5.1.4), which is only a block away, *Hala Thámova* used to belong to property owned by the *Karlín Real Estate Group*. For many years the development company provided the hall for various temporary uses, such as fairs, fashion shows, exhibitions, commercial events, etc. Currently the hall belongs to the businessman Zdeněk Bakala, and its fame of a photogenic site with huge premises for all kinds of events and temporary uses has been put to an end by the hall's redevelopment into a new administrative building.

- **Property:** The industrial building of *Hala Thámova*, also known as *Šípkárna*, was built in 1857. Alongside the current building of *Karlín Studios*, it used to belong to the *ČKD* company in the past, and its nickname *Šípkárna* was inspired by aircraft particles that used to be manufactured there. After the revolution in 1989, the hall remained hollow since its large and spacious premises could not be easily redeveloped for a new purpose. This allowed for the building's various temporal uses until 2012, when Zdeněk Bakala, in cooperation with the *KREG*, decided to dismantle the hall despite its historical



significance, and initiated its redevelopment into a new administrative building.

**Figure 22.** Independent fashion festival *CODE:MODE* in *Hala Thámova*



Source: zajaty.cz

- **Users of the space:** Regarding its temporary use, *Hala Thámova* differed from other industrial spaces. The development company (the *KREG*) not only owned the hall, but it also managed its occasional leasing for various temporary purposes, such as art exhibitions, fairs, fashion shows, and sometimes also various commercial purposes. Among organizations and initiatives which had leased the premises of *Hala Thámova*, we could find e.g. *CODE:MODE* - a festival of independent and original fashion, *Prague Biennale* - an international exhibition of art, *Designblock* - an international exhibition of new developments in Czech and international design, or an exhibition of diploma art pieces by fresh graduates of the Academy of Arts, the hemp fair *Cannabizz Prague*, and many others. The space also used to be occasionally provided for charity events, photography, shooting TV commercials, etc. In the past the space had hosted a few illegal parties.
- **Provider and conditions:** For several years the building remained empty, since the *KREG* did not know how to use it. The company then started to

provide the hall for occasional temporary events, offering relatively low rent for extensive premises. Nonetheless, the conditions of lease were different for each user, depending mainly on the size and length of each event, as well as its purpose. According to Jovanka Vlčková, one of the organizers of the alternative fashion fair *CODE:MODE*, the former owner of the *KREG*, Serge Borenstein, displayed generosity towards various unconventional and original cultural events; as a foreigner he felt that Prague had been missing similar events. Borenstein therefore tended to provide the premises of *Hala Thámova* relatively cheaply for projects he was fond of, e.g. *CODE:MODE* had to pay a symbolic weekly rent of 25,000 CZK plus utilities (cca 1,200 USD). Later on Zdeněk Bakala, belonging to the wealthiest of Czech businessmen, became the new owner of the hall due to the financial problems of the *KREG*. Many things then changed; Jovanka Vlčková claims that negotiations with Bakala were not as smooth, and the rent doubled. Currently Zdeněk Bakala is planning on turning the hall into a modern administrative building called *Karlín Hall 2*, which will also include a new multifunctional center for cultural and social events, as well as two galleries. Nonetheless, the new hall will have a completely different ambience, attracting a different type of audience, and most likely will not be affordable for certain social groups.

- **Surroundings:** *Hala Thámova* is in close proximity to *Karlín Studios* (see chapter n. 5.1.4).
- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** *Hala Thámova* wasn't originally meant to become a cultural project, although its premises are more than suitable for such a purpose and have always attracted various temporary uses. In the 1990s it was a popular center for various *freetekno* parties, or site-specific theatre and other alternative activities. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century its owner, the *KREG*, took advantage of the hall's popularity as an event space and started to lease it out in order to fill up the time gap between the hall's former and future use.
- **Financial support:** Organizations and initiatives, which used *Hala Thámova's* premises, applied for various grants, or used their own financial resources to cover the costs. Due to the hall's unprofitability and lack of finances for



redevelopment, the *KREG* eventually sold the hall to Zdeněk Bakala.<sup>41</sup>

- **Conclusion:** *Hala Thámova* was one of the last big industrial halls that could have been designed as a permanent site for various cultural events, fairs, festivals, happenings, workshops etc. Although the older inhabitants of Karlín neighborhood were predominantly not fond of the scrubby factory hall, young generations from across the city grew fond of the hall's impressive and highly photogenic premises.<sup>42</sup> Establishing a permanent cultural venue would require a long-term plan prepared in cooperation with the Municipality of Prague or a strong private investor. Unfortunately, neither the *KREG*, nor Zdeněk Bakala is willing to sponsor such an alternative project, despite their increasing awareness of the pressing need for cultural venues in Karlín neighborhood, where office and residential function strongly prevail. Their aim to build a modern cultural center most likely cannot make up for the loss of *Hala Thámova*; according to many opinions the atmosphere of the industrial hall can never truly be replaced. At the same time, many events, e.g. some site specific theatre, would not be appropriate for modern spaces. Maybe it is time for the developers to rethink the way they embrace industrial aesthetics and customize it on the basis of the tastes of contemporary young creative generations. It is also time to rethink the way we are protecting our industrial heritage, especially those which are more than 150 years old.

### 5.3.3 *Bubenská*

Right next to the busy junction of the expressways Bubenská and Nábřeží Kapitána Jaroše in Holešovice neighborhood, Prague 7, we can find a huge building known as the *Ústřední budova Elektrických podniků* (*The Headquarters of the Electricity Company*), sometimes also referred to as *Bubenská*. In 2004, the building was purchased by the *Orco Real Estate Group* (the *OREG* further in the text), which now leases the building to various artists and other creative professionals.

- **Property:** The building, designed by Adolf Beneš and Josef Kříž, was built

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.karlin.cz/public/userfiles/image/DN01022012.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.denik.cz/regiony/halu-ckd-v-karline-nahradi-ko20110817.html>

between the years 1927 and 1935. It is considered one of Prague's most important buildings built in the functionalist style, and it is therefore on the list of Czech cultural heritage. The building contains 33 000 meters square of office space.

**Figure 23.** Heritage building of *Bubenská*



Source: orco-realestate.cz

- **Users of the space:** Until the year 2009 the *Česká Spořitelna* bank was the building's long-term lessee. After the bank withdrawal from the contract, the *OREG* was unable to find a new lessee, supposedly due to low standards, which are not satisfactory for rich clients, and, which cannot be easily updated due to the heritage protection. Also, many clients are allegedly put off by the building's functionalist style, which reminds them of the former regime. On the other hand, the building's interiors are attractive for various artists and creative professionals, who now constitute the majority of lessees. Some spaces are also leased to a few NGOs, to *Divus* magazine, and others. According to the *OREG's* leasing coordinator Šárka Thérová, there has recently been an increasing demand for the premises among architects.
- **Provider and conditions:** Because of the inability to find rich clients for the building of *Bubenská*, the *OREG* had to lower the prices of rent and offer the building for less profitable use – in this case predominantly for creative uses. Many offices have been turned into studios, which are, nonetheless, not very

cheap to rent. The lease cancelling term is one month. The *OREG* openly admits that should a richer client demonstrate interest, the creative use of the building will have to end. However, such possibility is currently highly unlikely.

**Figure 24.** Functionalist architecture of *Bubenská* attracts artists and creative professionals



Source: orco-realestate.cz

- **Surroundings:** The location of *Bubenská* is perfect with respect to its accessibility to public transportation; it is in close proximity of the metro stop *Vltavská*, and a number of tramway lines. It is also right next to the Vltava river. The surroundings on the south and east side of the property are overall not very attractive; a busy network of expressways, slip roads and bridges creates a pedestrian unfriendly environment, and large brownfield area of the railway station *Bubny* separates the whole area from the eastern part of Holešovice neighborhood.
- **Establishing a space for alternative culture and experimentation:** Due to the high concentration of various creative uses in *Bubenská*, the big common spaces on the ground floor started to be used for various cultural events, art exhibitions, fairs, etc. There is also a cafeteria on the premises used by the *Divus* publisher, where people from the entire building can meet and share common space. Most recently, a canteen with lunch menus was also

established.

- **Financial support:** *Bubenská* is a commercial project of the *OREG*. Cultural activities, found on the premises of the building, have their own financial resources.
- **Conclusion:** The *Bubenská* project is an exemplary case of temporary use, which has resulted from a time-gap in between the former and future use. The building now has the potential to turn into a huge multifunctional alternative project, where art and culture are both created as well as shared with the public. Many other underused buildings could be used in such a way, although the main asset of *Bubenská* is also its unique architecture. Unfortunately, this enlightened attitude towards the property cannot be ascribed to the owner, the *OREG*, but rather to the heritage protection. If the building wasn't under the heritage protection, the owner would most likely upgrade it and rent it to a wealthier client. The future of the project is still unclear; however, due to the abundance of underused office spaces in the city of Prague, *Bubenská* can be expected to keep evolving into an interesting and vibrant center for culture and experimentation.

## 6. Prague's spaces of resistance

While the 1990s were a period full of squatters' experiments and attempts to create a true autonomous center of political resistance, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought an end to the golden age of Prague's squatting, turning it into a dying phenomenon. The general atmosphere started to change with the eviction of the popular squat *Ladronka* in 2000, accomplished based upon a municipal order, which provoked several protests predominantly among young people. During the subsequent years, alternative youth were disappointed by evictions of other long-term squats and violent interventions against projects with declaredly positive societal and cultural outreach, discouraging them from further attempts to establish a viable squat project that the public could learn to accept. In the meantime, the number of spaces suitable for squatting was diminishing, and the remaining empty spaces were frequently under apprehensive protection of their owners and often subject to speculative development. Most owners strictly opposed the idea of providing their underused property to any longer-term squatting project and negotiations between squatters and private owners were for the most part fruitless. In one case, there have been also a number of attempts by local authorities to close down a popular community center - a small pub named *Parukářka*, built by the inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhoods. The users of the pub have been struggling to gain an official permit to operate the pub throughout its entire existence, consequently becoming highly politically engaged and uncommonly resistant towards the local authorities' animosity.

This chapter will focus on the spaces of resistance in the atmosphere of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially during the conduct of this dissertation in the years 2010 - 2012. The only Prague squat that managed to survive most of an entire decade was the villa *Milada*, but even this squat was evicted in 2009. Its inhabitants then became the only truly resistant group in Prague, migrating around the city, trying to find a new space of resistance, but at the same time succumbing to the forces pressing on their existence within legal frameworks. As a result, some of their spaces were also legal and semi-legal. I will now introduce the different spaces that this group (with only a few permanent members and a number of members who continually change) occupied after their eviction from the villa *Milada*, as well as the different circumstances that accompanied their shifting in space. In a separate box I will also introduce the infocenters that have existed in Prague since the year 2000. The last case study of Part 6 is devoted to the *Parukářka* pub, which differs from Prague's squats as it is not an outright

political and autonomous project. However, due to the animosity of the local authorities it continues to operate in a way that isn't completely legal. Part 6 is the most important in our understanding of the oppressive nature of the current regime, which will be further evaluated in Part 7.

## **6.1 Illegal and autonomous**

### **6.1.1 Autonomous center *Milada***

*Milada*, the longest existing squat in Czechia, was first occupied on May 1, 1998 in an abandoned villa in close proximity of the university dormitory *Koleje 17.listopadu* in Trója neighborhood in Prague 8. It served as a center for the Prague anarcho-autonomous scene.

- **Property:** The solitary house of the villa had been underused for ten years, and in a state of disrepair. Officially, the building did not exist due to its removal from the real estate cadastre, which came about as a result of a planned demolition of the building. The demolition never took place — thanks to the inhabitants of *Milada's* neighboring house, who managed to divert the demolition of their house and its close surroundings. Some of the squatters also occupied another neighboring abandoned house, which was nicknamed *Prase*.
- **Users of the space:** The squatters in the villa *Milada* were members of Prague's anarcho-autonomous scene, predominantly anti-fascistically oriented. The squat served both as a space of resistance and as a housing solution.
- **Negotiations with the owner:** Although officially nonexistent, the villa was administrated by a national institution - *the Institute for the Research of Information*, which declaredly had not used the villa for several decades. Squatters dealt with the Institute and managed to gain permission to use the building. A month later, however, the squat was subject to a police raid, as a result of which the Institute backed out of its unofficial agreement with the squatters.
- **Surroundings:** The villa *Milada* was located in a sparsely built up area on the east end of the slightly upscale residential Trója neighborhood. The villa was

surrounded by a cliff, two high-rise buildings of a dormitory, and a highway bridge. University students from the dormitory were the only neighbors who occasionally complained about the noise from *Milada*, but many of them were also the squatters' supporters.

- **Establishing a space of resistance:** The squatters resisted the police raid and remained in the property. During its decade of existence, *Milada* developed a bar, infoshop and a concert hall. It hosted various cultural events, especially punk concerts, *freetekno* parties, and a squatters' festival. *Milada* served as a platform for various activities, such as workshops, lectures, and preparations for the anti-globalization protests of 2000. Except for charitable activities, such as food cooking by *Food Not Bombs*<sup>43</sup>, the autonomous center *Milada* never had ambitions to outreach to the wider society, unlike some of the squat projects evicted in the preceding years. Neither did it develop any meaningful political activity, but rather it remained mainly anti-fascistically oriented.
- **Financial support:** As an autonomous center, *Milada* operated independently of public or private sponsorship. Financial resources were occasionally collected at concerts. Most food was collected in a freegan<sup>44</sup> way.
- **Evictions:** Attempts to evict the house, either by the police or by private security agencies, were repeated several times. The most dramatic attempt took place in October 1998, leading to a home defense and siege that lasted several days and was accompanied by the presence of the squatters' supporters, and support by students from the dormitory. Some of the squatters remained on the roof of *Milada* for several days. Eventually, one of the squatters roped down from the neighboring dormitory to the roof of the squat, equipped with food and sleeping bags. The incident received the media's attention and ended up in the squatters' success. In June 2009, the building was again registered in the real estate cadastre. When the institute eventually decided to sell the villa, the squatters were the first clients who showed interest in buying it, but the

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<sup>43</sup> *Food Not Bombs* is a worldwide movement of volunteering collectives serving free vegan and vegetarian food to other people, especially to the people in need.

<sup>44</sup> Freeganism is a practice of collecting and eating discarded food which is still edible and unspoiled. The philosophy behind this practice is a protest against the capitalistic logic of wasting food that could serve for feeding starving populations. Most freegans refuse abusing animals as a commodity and therefore eat mostly vegan food that does not contain any animal products.



institute refused to negotiate with them.

In the end the institute ordered the squat's eviction due to alleged complaints of the students in the neighboring dormitory. The eviction on June 30, 2009, was again accompanied by extensive support from many protesting people and received widespread media coverage; presumably due to this publicity the contemporary minister for human rights Michal Kocáb (a former *underground* musician in the socialistic Czechoslovakia) promised to provide squatters with a new building for their activities.

**Figure 25.** Eviction of *Milada* on June 30, 2009



Photo: Jan Schejbal, tyden.cz

- **Conclusion:** The autonomous center *Milada* was not the most positive example of a squat that could demonstrate the potential that squatting has for the society. Some people complained that the squatters did not keep the villa and its surroundings clean and invested little into the villa's repairs. However, the squatters kept the villa in a relatively good shape, considering its condition prior to, and after the occupation. Instead of remaining empty and disintegrating it provided home to a number of young people, and an opportunity to socialize for Prague's alternative youth, who appreciated the adventurous and unfettered atmosphere of the villa, and its visible deviation



from the stereotypical surroundings shaped by capital investment and policed by capitalistic relations. The support of the alternative youth was obvious during each attempt to evict the villa. Instead of revealing the true identities of these people and the reasons behind their desire to keep the autonomous center alive, the discourse of the public and media labeled the whole group as “squatters”, despite the fact that the majority of these young people do not live in squats, and treated them as a group of unadaptable societal drop-outs and parasites on society who do not respect private ownership.

#### **Box 16. Police raids against squatters’ happenings**

**Occupation of the building in Apolinářská street:** On September 12, 2009, the squatters and their supporters responded to the eviction of *Milada* by a protest occupation of the historical building of the former steam spa in Apolinářská Street, Prague 2. The occupation of the underused building, which had long been in the state of disrepair, was joined by a protest march of the sympathizers. The purpose of the symbolic march and occupation, which were held under the motto “Housing is the Right”, was to draw attention to the high number of empty and derelict buildings in Prague, including historical ones, which nobody takes care of, as well as to the increasing number of people who cannot afford housing. The event was monitored by the police. The owner of the building announced that he did not desire to provide his building for squatting and the assembly in front of the building was violently dispersed by the anti-riot police.<sup>45</sup> More than 70 people were detained and subsequently released. A group of the people who stayed inside the building was evicted during nighttime hours by a special commando; 15 persons were consequently charged with trespassing. During the proceedings, which took one and half years, trials were accompanied by small protest happenings. The judgment finally decided in favor of the people charged with trespassing. The city court decided that their act was not dangerous enough to be regarded as a criminal act, and also considered the fact that the building had not been taken care of by its owner, despite its location in the monument preserve.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> <http://tn.nova.cz/zpravy/regionalni/squatteri-vymeni-kocabuv-byt-za-dum-poperou-se-s-policisty.html>

<sup>46</sup> [http://praha.idnes.cz/squateri-nespachali-obsazenim-budovy-na-albertove-trestny-cin-rekl-soud-14x-/praha-zpravy.aspx?c=A110419\\_105026\\_praha-zpravy\\_ab](http://praha.idnes.cz/squateri-nespachali-obsazenim-budovy-na-albertove-trestny-cin-rekl-soud-14x-/praha-zpravy.aspx?c=A110419_105026_praha-zpravy_ab)

**Commemorative happening in *Milada* three years after its eviction:**

On June 30, 2012, a small commemorative event was organized in the former squat, *Milada*. The event was attended by approximately 40 of *Milada*'s former inhabitants and their friends and consisted of a picnic and a subsequent concert. It was supposed to point out the fact that the villa had remained abandoned and decaying since the eviction in 2009.<sup>47</sup>

The groups' plan was to spend only one night on the premises and leave early in the morning. However, at 1 o'clock in the morning, a 100 strong anti-riot police force, using inordinately violent practices, dispersed the concert, evicting the attendees. Despite their passive resistance, those in attendance were beat up and banished by tear gas and detonators. The anti-riot police also destroyed the music apparatus and instruments used in the concert.

## 6.2 Legal and autonomous

### 6.2.1 *Truhla*

After their eviction from the villa *Milada*, a businessman Petr Svinka offered the squatters a temporary refuge on premises of his property on Truhlářská Street, a residential building in the very center of the city. For a period of one year, the squatters were able to operate in their new refuge, which became known as a cultural and community center under the nickname *Truhla* (derived from the name of the street Truhlářská, a word which means a coffin or a box). Circumstances around *Truhla* were highly disputable due to the suspicion that Petr Svinka intended to use the squatters in order to get rid of the existing tenants on his property. This attempt was unsuccessful due to the squatters unifying with the tenants. After one year, the squatters' contract of lease was not renewed, and the squatters were forced to leave.

- **Property:** The residential building owned by Petr Svinka in the very center of the city had several empty apartments, which had been emptied by the former owner of the building due to his plan to redevelop the building for commercial purposes. The intention of Petr Svinka was to turn the building into a hotel, but he was unable to pursue this due to a few remaining tenants in the building.

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<sup>47</sup> [http://www.denik.cz/z\\_domova/o-vilu-miladu-kde-zili-squatter-i-nema-nikdo-zajem.html?reakce=link&id=434477](http://www.denik.cz/z_domova/o-vilu-miladu-kde-zili-squatter-i-nema-nikdo-zajem.html?reakce=link&id=434477)

For a period of one year squatters were allowed to occupy three apartments, the basement and the yard, and pursue their cultural and social activities.

- **Provider and conditions:** When the minister for human rights, Michal Kocáb, started to look for a space for evicted squatters, Petr Svinka came up with a generous offer.<sup>48</sup> Petr Svinka owns a number of suspicious companies, including a real estate agency *Truhlářská Reality*, which had purchased the half-empty building that Svinka subsequently provided to the squatters. The squatters were allowed to use empty premises in his building for the period of six months in exchange for a symbolic one crown rent, and for paying the utilities. At the end of the period, Svinka prolonged the contract of lease with squatters by another half a year. In summer 2010, squatters had to vacate their refuge in the Truhlářská Street, and move elsewhere.
- **Social circumstance:** Allowing squatters to occupy empty apartments in a centrally located building free of charge gave rise to much controversy among the public. According to some opinions, the businessman's generosity towards squatters was inappropriate and unfair towards the rest of the society. The minister, Michal Kocáb, was simultaneously critiqued by the city's contemporary vice mayor, Rudolf Blažek (who was in charge of the city during the absence of the mayor Pavel Bém), for helping and the squatters at the time when his help was more needed by people in the regions affected by floods.<sup>49</sup> The minister was also accused with allowing the oppression of Svinka's tenants by forcing them to cohabit with supposedly maladapted societal drop-outs; in response to such claim the vice-mayor, Rudolf Blažek, announced in the media that the tenants could temporarily use accommodation in municipal apartments in response to the general public opinion that their sharing of a common building with the squatters was unacceptable. The vice-mayor also emphasized that minister Kocáb would have to cover the entire costs of such provision.<sup>50</sup> According to the minister Kocáb similar reactions stemmed from the prevalence of intolerance, xenophobia, and fear of the unknown in the

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<sup>48</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/svinka-squateri-se-dostali-na-ulici-pomohl-jsem-jim-fxk-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A090708\\_081311\\_ln\\_domov\\_pks](http://www.lidovky.cz/svinka-squateri-se-dostali-na-ulici-pomohl-jsem-jim-fxk-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090708_081311_ln_domov_pks)

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/praha-nabizi-byty-lidem-kteri-ziji-se-squateri-zaplatit-chce-po-kocabovi-1ou-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A090708\\_121909\\_ln\\_praha\\_bat](http://www.lidovky.cz/praha-nabizi-byty-lidem-kteri-ziji-se-squateri-zaplatit-chce-po-kocabovi-1ou-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090708_121909_ln_praha_bat)

<sup>50</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/praha-nabizi-byty-lidem-kteri-ziji-se-squateri-zaplatit-chce-po-kocabovi-1ou-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A090708\\_121909\\_ln\\_praha\\_bat](http://www.lidovky.cz/praha-nabizi-byty-lidem-kteri-ziji-se-squateri-zaplatit-chce-po-kocabovi-1ou-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090708_121909_ln_praha_bat)

Czech society.<sup>51</sup>

- **Tenants' opinion on their cohabitation with the squatters:** Before the squatters moved into the building, the remaining tenants were speculating about Petr Svinka's intention to use squatters as a tool for expelling them from their apartments. Milan Smrž, a life-long tenant of the house in Truhlářská, whose family had resided in Svinka's house for 70 years, describes Petr Svinka as a discreditable and malicious landlord who systematically endeavors to banish the remaining tenants from their apartments and takes little care of the physical condition of the house. The tenants and other local residents protested against the squatters's presence in the area by launching a petition, which was organized by the Prague 1 councilors Jan Arnstein and Antonín Kazda.<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 26.** *Truhla* in Truhlářská Street



Photo: Author

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<sup>51</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/zastance-squateru-kocab-jsou-snad-dredy-a-nausnice-drsne-pk4-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A090709\\_075101\\_ln\\_domov\\_ppe](http://www.lidovky.cz/zastance-squateru-kocab-jsou-snad-dredy-a-nausnice-drsne-pk4-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090709_075101_ln_domov_ppe)

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/proti-squaterum-vznikla-petice-vecer-budou-jednat-s-najemniky-pbw-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A090709\\_145402\\_ln\\_domov\\_val](http://www.lidovky.cz/proti-squaterum-vznikla-petice-vecer-budou-jednat-s-najemniky-pbw-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090709_145402_ln_domov_val)

**Figure 27.** Political exhibition called *City for sale* in the basement of *Truhla*



Photo: Author

- **Squatters' standpoint:** In response to Svinka's offer, squatters proclaimed that the apartments were an inadequate compensation for the loss of the villa, and demanded a more appropriate property.<sup>53</sup> The minister, Michal Kocáb, addressed most city halls in Prague, asking them to provide an adequate building for the squatters; none of the city halls responded to his appeal. Aware of Petr Svinka's hidden motivations, the squatters started to use the apartments in Truhlářská Street.
- **Squatters' and tenants' union:** After moving into the house the squatters initiated negotiations with other tenants regarding the rules for their cohabitation and assured their neighbors that they strictly refused to serve the unethical intentions of Petr Svinka and offered the tenants their help in organizing against potential displacement. Most tenants learned that there was no need to be afraid of the young unconventional looking people; the squatters and the tenants started to get along and some even became friends and did various activities together.

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<sup>53</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/squatter-i-v-centru-bydlet-nechteji-za-miladu-zadaji-adekvatni-nahradu-1e0-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A090708\\_154412\\_ln\\_domov\\_mtr](http://www.lidovky.cz/squatter-i-v-centru-bydlet-nechteji-za-miladu-zadaji-adekvatni-nahradu-1e0-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090708_154412_ln_domov_mtr)

- **Establishing a space of resistance with social and community services:**

When the relationships with the tenants settled, *Truhla* soon started to operate as a lively community center. Compared to the villa *Milada*, which was mainly focused on punk and hardcore concerts, *Truhla* was more easily accessible due to its central location, and was also considerably more inclusive, welcoming, and offered a more vibrant program. The basement served for concerts and exhibitions; the yard for bike repairs workshops, and public cooking; the apartments served for communal cooking, discussions, screenings, workshops, art classes, sports classes etc. The squatters in *Truhla* also started cooking freegan meals for their neighbors<sup>54</sup> and for other people in need. *Truhla* then became a popular destination not only for alternative young people, but also for the elderly with financial problems, who appreciated the possibility of being served free meals. One old lady in a difficult life situation commented during one of her visits to *Truhla*:

*“These people are so much nicer than the ones who are trying to warn us that these people are bad. I come here and they feed me for free, while the big guys up there are constantly trying to rip me off, they know no mercy” (anonymous old lady).*

- **Conclusion:** The unusual situation, in which the squatters were first evicted and consequently helped by actors in politics and business, gave rise to a widespread debate about squatting in the Czech society, whose familiarity with this phenomenon has been traditionally low and misinformed by media. The debate was further solidified by the case of squatters’ demonstrative occupation of the building in Apolinářská Street (see Box 16.), followed by court proceedings lasting one and half years. Even though one of the aims of the occupation was to point to the problem of real estate speculation in Prague, the public still perceived squatting as a symbolic representation of undesirable deviant behavior that must be eradicated. The relatively peaceful time spent in the building of Petr Svinka allowed the squatters to hold regular debates about the next steps towards securing a new autonomous center. These debates were

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<sup>54</sup> [http://www.lidovky.cz/squateri-v-centru-prahy-pohostili-sousedy-jidlem-z-kontejneru-pv6-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A090726\\_212409\\_ln\\_domov\\_mev](http://www.lidovky.cz/squateri-v-centru-prahy-pohostili-sousedy-jidlem-z-kontejneru-pv6-/ln_domov.asp?c=A090726_212409_ln_domov_mev)

typically held in cooperation with other anarchist intellectuals and activists, and allowed the squatters' community to rethink and clarify the main principles of the squatters' movement in the contemporary society. Some debates were also attended by one of the tenants of the house in Truhlářská Street, Mr. Milan Smrž.

In general, we can assume that the whole case increased the awareness of the society about the phenomenon of squatting, as well as the phenomenon of bad practices of some of the owners of real estate in Prague towards their tenants and their property. On the other hand, local authorities again displayed a lack of tolerance towards practices that deviate from the mainstream norms, both by disagreeing with the city assisting the squatters' interests, and by refusing to provide any kind of property for an alternative cultural and community center.

### **6.2.2 DIS Centrum**

In June 2010, a few anarchists started to rent a small warehouse within the complex of the *Nákladové nádraží Žižkov*, an old freight station in Žižkov neighborhood, Prague 3, and were soon joined by some of the squatters from *Truhla*. Together, they founded a new autonomous center which they called the *DIS Centrum*.<sup>55</sup> For a period of one year, it served as a legal squat with a concert hall, bar, infoshop and a semi-legal trailer park.

- **Property:** The warehouse was a one-story building which served as a kitchen, a workroom, a concert hall with an improvised bar, a library and a computer room. The building's premises did not provide enough space for bedrooms, and the surroundings of the warehouse therefore turned into a small trailer park full of vans, trucks and campers, which served as bedrooms for their owners.
- **Users of the space:** The collective, composed of the anarchists from the infoshop *Revolver* (see Box 18.) and of the former inhabitants of *Milada* and *Truhla*, founded a civil organization called *Centrum svobodného vzdělávání*

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<sup>55</sup> <http://periferia.cz/clanky/novy-neziskovy-nejen-hudebni-klub-discentrum-486/>

(*Center of Free Education*), which became the official user of the *DIS Centrum*. The newly founded autonomous center became attractive for other members of Prague's alternative scene, who had their own motor homes and therefore started to use the site as a small trailer park. Some members of the collective perceived the *DIS Centrum* mainly as a housing arrangement for their alternative lifestyle, while other members of the collective were actively trying to pursue various social and political activities.

- **Provider and conditions:** The owners of the warehouse were Mr. and Mrs. Knákal. The space was rented out for a monthly rent of 22,240 CZK (cca 1,080 USD), which the inhabitants of the *DIS Centrum* covered by the revenue received through organizing concerts and selling beer and vegan food, or by renting out their premises for concerts organized by people not associated with the center, or for band rehearsals. According to the squatters, the owners were very accommodating and displayed certain liking for alternative cultures and countercultures. Mr. Knákal also often stood up for the squatters when other users of the freight station tended to blame different kinds of problems, such as littering, on the unconventional group of young people.

The trailer park was taking up property that belonged to the freight station and was not part of the warehouse. After some initial complaints, the freight station and the squatters finally settled on three-month's payments for the space for their trailer park.

- **Surroundings:** The small warehouse was located in the controversial brownfield area, which is dominated by numerous old railways and a big industrial building of the old freight station of *Nákladové nádraží Žižkov*, famous for its functionalist architecture. However, the brownfield area is in close proximity to the city center and therefore is intended for revitalization by a development company. On the other hand, there is a strong lobby push for the building's heritage protection. The location is convenient for alternative uses, since it is relatively distant from residential areas.
- **Establishing a space of resistance:** The original purpose of the *DIS Centrum* was to create a space for an infoshop, which would provide enough space for other activities, such as concerts. In the end, concerts became something that the users of the space were dependent on, since organizing cultural events was



the main way of generating revenue needed to cover the rent. Organizing concerts also significantly limited the squatters' ability to devote their time to the same kind of cultural and social activities previously pursued in *Truhla*.

**Figure 28.** *DIS Centrum*



Photo: Author

- **Conclusion:** The location of the *DIS Centrum* was ideal, since the brownfield area was not only close to the city center, but also provided a location far enough from residential zones ensuring the squatters didn't disturb any residents. Through interviews of random employees of the freight station, I discovered a general unawareness of the squatters' presence. The squatters complained only about a few xenophobic individuals who found the *DIS Centrum* undesirable due to their own prejudices. Eventually, the inhabitants of the *DIS Centrum* became increasingly frustrated by the inevitability of focusing on activities aimed at generating revenue; by the end of the year 2011, the squatters finally decided to leave the warehouse and move elsewhere.

**Box 17. Festival *Květy Zla* (*Flowers of Evil*)**

One of the most memorable events held in *DIS Centrum* was an

exhibition called *Veřejný Zájem (Public Interest)*, which was part of a two-day festival called *Květy Zla (The Flowers of Evil)*, held in Prague in May 2011. The organizers of the festival arranged an improvised stage on one of the railway platforms within the complex of the freight station, and around one hundred people came to see unauthorized, spontaneously held concerts of live music. The event took place at the time of heated discussions about the future of the main building of the freight station, meant to be torn down by developers despite its value as an industrial heritage building with a specific functionalist architecture. The message behind the concert held in the premises of the station was a critique of its possible demolition.

### **Box 18. Anarchist infocenters, infocafés and infoshops in Prague**

Anarchist infocenters, infoshops and infocafés are typically small autonomous spaces for anarchists' socializing and political organizing, most often located in larger cities where the demand for anarchistic activities is sufficiently high. Their main purpose is to serve various "subversive" activities, such as political discussions, film screenings, workshops, preparations for direct actions and campaigns, or printing and distribution of anarchistic press and fanzines. They typically contain a library with literature that predominantly focuses on politics, activism, social science, etc. One of the most important aspects of these autonomous spaces is the embodiment of the values that anarchistic movements preach; the essence of infocenters, infocafés, and infoshops is solidarity, anti-capitalistic and antiauthoritarian attitude, and tolerance to various minorities. On the other hand, they strictly refuse to tolerate any kind of oppression, manifestations of racial superiority, patriotism or sexist behavior. To demonstrate their refusal of human superiority over animals, many anarchistic spaces do not serve meat and sometimes not even dairy products. Refreshment sold in these spaces is cheap and the revenue is typically invested back into the space, e.g. in the form of rent or small repairs, or for financing the activities.

One of Prague's first infocenters was in *Ladronka* squat. After its eviction, another center operated in *Milada* squat. Several infocenters were also operated in legally rented premises. Here is their list:

**Krtkova kolona:** The anarchist community from *Ladronka* opened a small infocafé called *Krtkova kolona*<sup>56</sup> in the Sochařská Street in Letná neighborhood, Prague 7. The infocafé was focused purely on political activities, due to which it had lack of visitors and finished in 2009 after eight years of its existence.

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<sup>56</sup> [http://www.csaf.cz/co\\_pisu\\_inde.php?sprava=1503](http://www.csaf.cz/co_pisu_inde.php?sprava=1503)

**Revolver:** In 2009 a slightly different collective opened a new infoshop called *Revolver*<sup>57</sup> in the Mečislavova Street in Nusle neighborhood, Prague 4. Again, the space served to provide only political discussions and organizing. In 2010 the infoshop ceased due to the same reasons as *Krtkova kolona*.

**DIS Centrum:** In 2010 the collective from *Revolver* relocated their activities to the *DIS Centrum* in Žižkov, where political activities combined with concerts, communal living and other activities such as film screenings, lectures, workshops, art exhibitions, bike repairs, or gardening (ČSAF 2010<sup>58</sup>). The infoshop in *DIS Centrum* did not last too long either; it ceased together with the squatters' relocating to a different space.

**Salé:** In January 2012 a new younger collective decided to refresh the moribund anarchist scene in Prague and opened a new space in the Orebitská Street in Žižkov neighborhood, Prague 3. The space was called *Salé* after the pirate colony from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which in the past used to be an economically, politically and spiritually independent territory located in the north-west of Africa. The small ground floor space cannot be spotted from the street and an uninformed passerby could not find it. The informed ones must ring the door bell before they can enter. At first glance *Salé* feels friendlier and more inclusive than all previous infocenters. The collective seems younger, more inviting and eager to involve new people. Apart from the usual range of activities, *Salé* also regularly offers vegan dinners and a freeshop, where people can exchange things which they no more use. This freeshop initiative sometimes takes the form of an outdoor event called *Bezpeněžní zóna* (*Moneyless Zone*).

## 6.3 Semi-legal and autonomous

### 6.3.1 Zlý Čin (or Zločin)

*Zlý Čin* was a short-lived project established in a large factory building in Zličín neighborhood, Prague 5. The squatters moved there in winter 2011 after they had decided that they were no more willing to pay high rent for their base in the warehouse in the *Nákladové nádraží Žižkov*.

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<sup>57</sup> <http://kk.czechcore.cz/?archiv=0> , [www.infoshop-revolver.cz](http://www.infoshop-revolver.cz)

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.csaf.cz/spravy.php?sprava=1572>

**Figure 29.** Preparation of a performance in *Zlý Čin*



Photo: Brad McGregor

- **Property:** The location was near the subway stop Zličín in the south-west end of the city of Prague. The huge abandoned factory premises were big enough for the squatters to be able to establish a trailer park right inside the factory.
- **Negotiations with the owner:** The factory building belonged to the *Central Group*, a company specialized at residential development. The squatters were soon discovered by an agent of the company, who decided that they could stay until the building's demolition, planned in the near future, hoping that the squatters would protect the factory from thieves etc.
- **Establishing a cultural project:** The new refuge was nicknamed *Zlý Čin* (an anagram of the name of the location – *Zličín* – its English meaning is *Evil Act*). After the severe winter of 2011/2012, the squatters started with spring cleanings and by organizing a cultural program. Several parties, screenings, games and theatre plays took place in their huge premises. The space was especially convenient for big rave parties.
- **Eviction:** On Friday, April 6, 2012, the squatters held the very first big *freetekno* party, and thereby unwillingly terminated their occupation of *Zlý Čin*.

Due to complaints of the surrounding residents the first big party ended up by a police raid and a concomitant eviction of the entire squat.<sup>59</sup>

- **Conclusion:** The factory building was not the most suitable place for creating an autonomous center, as it was quite far from the city, and the premises of the factory building were too big to be maintained by a small group of squatters. Circumstances around the squatters' eviction from the factory building were very unclear. The owner of the building didn't mind their presence and therefore it seems that the *freetekno party* served only as a pretext for the police who wanted to get rid of the squatters from the location.

### 6.3.2 Cibulka

The historical mansion *Cibulka* in Košíře neighborhood, Prague 5, became the new refuge of the squatters evicted from *Zlý Čin*, who relocated to *Cibulka* out of lack of other options in April 2012.

**Figure 30.** *Cibulka* during the festival *Semeno Dobra*



Photo: Michal Ureš

- **Property:** The mansion *Cibulka* is located in a park in a symphonic coexistence with the surrounding landscape. Its history reaches to the middle-ages, but most of the property was built in the beginning of the 19th century.

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<sup>59</sup> [http://praha.idnes.cz/nepovolena-technoparty-na-zlicine-d5h-/praha-zpravy.aspx?c=A120407\\_124139\\_praha-zpravy\\_spi](http://praha.idnes.cz/nepovolena-technoparty-na-zlicine-d5h-/praha-zpravy.aspx?c=A120407_124139_praha-zpravy_spi)  
<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/regiony/171396-policiste-zastavili-neohlasenou-technoparty-v-trebonicich/>  
<http://tn.nova.cz/zpravy/ceknakronika/policiste-zasahuji-u-nepovolene-technoparty-na-zlicine.html>

The whole complex, which consists of gardens, arbours, elaborate stairs, walls, fountains, etc., is on the list of protected heritage. In the past, the abandoned mansion was several times illegally occupied by squatters or served for *freetekno* parties.

- **Provider and conditions:** Since the year 1990, *Cibulka* has been owned by a travel agency *Autoturist*, which wanted to redevelop the mansion into a hotel, but its megalomaniac projects kept being refused by the preservationists. Despite the general dissatisfaction of the local inhabitants and the preservationists, the owner of the building kept postponing the repairs, and the mansion continued to decay. The move of the squatters from *Zlý Čin* to *Cibulka* coincided with the simultaneous initiative of the civil organization A2 called *Oživte si barák (Enliven Your House)*, whose aim was to raise public awareness of the number of decaying historical buildings in Prague which their owners leave abandoned and disintegrating. In May 2012 two events were held in *Cibulka*; while the first one – film screenings – took place without the permission of the owner, the second one – the festival *Semeno Dobra (The Good Seed – 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of the festival Flowers of Evil*, see Box 17.) was already held with the permission of *Autoturist*. Due to more than two decades of its problematic approach towards the property, *Autoturist* finally agreed to the initiative of A2, which wanted to use the mansion for cultural purposes in cooperation with the squatters, whose occupation of the property was conditioned by their agreeing to basic maintenance of the property.
- **Conclusion:** Legalizing the temporary use of *Cibulka* for cultural purposes and for squatters' activities is, after a long time, the first positive step towards more inclusive practices in the city. However, for it to happen, two decades of the historical mansion's deterioration and its being despised by the local community had to occur beforehand. Nonetheless, *Cibulka* is a popular site among the residents from the surrounding areas, and the squatters finally have a chance to show that not only is squatting not a dangerous phenomenon, but also creates inclusive, creative and inspiring localities that the society can benefit from, and not necessarily only in terms of economic profit.



## 6.4 Semi-legal and neutral

### 6.4.1 Hospůdka *Parukářka*

One of the case studies of this dissertation focuses on a small community center, which happens to be a space of alternative culture, as well as a space of a resistance movement. The center was originally meant to provide an affordable space for grassroots culture, activities and the socializing of people from the surrounding neighborhoods, but in the end its users became resistant due to the animosity of the local authorities. In fact, the center is a small independent pub, known under the name *Parukářka*, which is also the name of the surrounding park located near the Olšanské Square in Žižkov neighborhood, Prague 3. The pub is on the south-west edge of the hilly park, and therefore has an unusually impressive view of Prague's historical sites. The seemingly idyllic spot where free spirited grassroots culture and inclusive communal life combines with greenery and beautiful scenery in the middle of an urbanized area deals with many administrative difficulties imposed by the local authorities.

**Figure 31. and 32.** *Parukářka* in summer time



Source: [hospudkaparukarka.cz](http://hospudkaparukarka.cz) and [people.cz](http://people.cz)

- **Property:** The *Parukářka* pub is located inside a wooden cabin which was built by Vladimír Gregůrek and a group of his friends next to the park's public toilet in mid 1990s. The pub has a simple front garden with benches, where visitors can overlook the city's panorama, and a small wooden booth which Vladimír Gregůrek built in order to have an extra tap for the visitors, who come in high numbers during the spring and summer time.

- **Users of the space:** The owner of the pub is Vladimír Gregůrek. Over the years of the pub's existence, he has been surrounded by a coherent community of barflies – mostly locals, members of various alternative subcultures, former adherents of the Czech *underground* and rock scene, and other unconventional and free-spirited individuals. A group of people, who surrounded around the pub, formed a civil group called *Parukářka*, which participates on various non-profit cultural and social events, which have both alternative as well as popular character. The scope of the activities of the civil group also include protection of nature and environment from industrial and commercial activities, especially in the area of the *Parukářka* park, and supporting the development of the locality in a way that can be tolerable by both autochthons and new inhabitants. Occasionally, other organizations and initiatives or interest groups use the park adjacent to the pub for organizing their own events, such as gatherings for the *Veggie Parade*, *Million Marihuana March*, fireshows etc.
- **Provider and conditions:** Although Vladimír Gregůrek is the owner of the pub, the community of his friends built the pub spontaneously on the municipal land and used public toilets in exchange for taking care of them instead of the local authorities. However, due to using municipal land and public toilets, the community around the *Parukářka* pub had to face many bureaucratic difficulties, and became subject of blackmail. Some members of the local authorities in Prague 3 perceived the *Parukářka* pub as a space of spontaneous communal life that they cannot control, others saw it as a lost business opportunity for the city district of Prague 3, while some had conflicting interests due to their connections with the local development, for which they perceived the pub as a strategic place that needs modernization in order to improve the image of the locality for new affluent residents in the nearby gated community and other affluent newcomers to the gentrifying surroundings.
- **Surroundings:** The pub is surrounded by a very attractive park with a beautiful view, which makes pressure on the pub's demolition even more intensive. Žižkov neighborhood was originally a working-class area, and many local inhabitants still belong to low-income social groups. However, the area is now undergoing gentrification, mainly due to its close proximity to the city center. In the past two decades, Žižkov has gained a substantial number of



higher-income inhabitants. Nonetheless, it is disputable whether these groups favor the aesthetics which local authorities are trying to impose on the refreshment facilities in the park. In other words, it is quite possible that the status quo of *Parukářka* is what makes the location so appealing.

#### **Box 19. The *Parukářka* Case**

The *Parukářka* pub's problems started at the very beginning of its existence in 1995. At that time, Vladimír Gregůrek, who later became the keeper of the pub, asked local authorities in Prague 3 for a permit to build a refreshment cabin next to the park's public toilets. The Borough building permits office issued a temporary permit to build a cabin, valid only for two years. At the same time, Gregůrek and the City of Prague signed a lease with indeterminate duration for the plot underneath the cabin. Another lease was also signed with the city district of Prague 3 for the building with toilets next to the cabin. Gregůrek and the respective lessors subsequently prolonged the contracts several times. The building permits office prolonged the use permit for the cabin until August 2000. In 2002 Gregůrek asked the building permits office for permission to build a small wooden booth with its own tap outside of the pub. The administration did not respond, but subsequently approval was received from the Prague 3 mayor, Vladimír Holzknecht. In 2003 the Prague 3 Department of Construction called for the demolition of the cabin due to its expired use permit. It also called for the demolition of the wooden booth and some other minor structures due to missing building permits. Gregůrek then asked for another extension of the use permit, and for a personal appointment with the mayor of Prague 3. Both requests were ignored. To appeal the decision to demolish the *Parukářka* pub, citizens launched a petition signed by five and half thousand people. Gregůrek subsequently faced an extremely uncooperative and irregular approach by the local authorities. For example, he was invited to participate in the proceedings of the Committee for Trade and Services, but the invitation was delivered when the proceedings were already over. In December 2003 Gregůrek learned that the plot underneath the *Parukářka* pub had been transferred from the Citywide administration to Prague 3 in 1998; Gregůrek had not been informed about this change for five years. The year 2004 was particularly critical. While Gregůrek kept his pub open to the public in spite of having not secured a permit extension, Prague 3 officials announced that the *Parukářka* pub would be replaced by a new bar with better hygienic standards. In 2005 the council of Prague 3 finally reacted to Gregůrek's application for the extension of the use permit; the application was denied. In 2006 the authorities increased their pressure on Gregůrek, calling for an immediate removal of all his buildings. Gregůrek launched another petition; three thousand signatories appealed to the authorities to keep the *Parukářka* pub as it was, and to

use the money destined for a new bar for one of the other parks in Prague 3 that still lack a similar enterprise. The petition was rejected due to its non-adherence to the legally established petition format. The *Parukářka* civic group then entered into negotiations regarding the *Parukářka* pub with the authorities in Prague 3. In May 2006 the group received information about the initiation of administrative proceedings regarding the siting of a *Parukářka Klinik* building on the north-east edge of the *Parukářka* park. In October 2006 the group was informed that the Prague 3 council had approved a new construction in the park; it was not clear if the building of the pub was going to be affected too. Subsequently Prague 3 issued a public notice regarding the initiation of planning permit proceedings regarding a new refreshment cabin and public toilets on the current plot of the *Parukářka* pub. Contrary to the law, the *Parukářka* civic group and other eligible civil groups were not invited to participate in the proceedings, and asked to be added. In November 2007 the civic group *Parukářka* appealed against the proposal for the new building, pointing to its unsuitability for the location and its natural character. Consequently the Council allocated 10 million CZK (cca 486,000 USD) for the building of the new bar, which the *Parukářka* civil group considered a waste of public money.<sup>60</sup> According to the opposition councilor of Prague 3 at that time, Matěj Stropnický, the reason why the pressure on *Parukářka* pub became fiercer during the years of 2006 and 2007 is due to the completion of the nearby gated community called *Central Park Praha* on the south-east end of the *Parukářka* park. Local authorities in Prague 3, out of which some had a financial interest in the development of the gated community, were planning on replacing the *Parukářka* pub with a higher-standard restaurant for the future inhabitants of the community. For a number of reasons, however, most of the apartments in the gated community remained empty, and during the conduct of this research the local authorities temporarily reduced their pressure on the *Parukářka* pub. However, continual refusal to issue the building permit for the pub allows the local authorities to maintain their leverage over the pub and its owner, and makes the future of this unique site with its independent culture and communal life very uncertain.

- **Establishing a space of alternative culture and resistance:** The idea of the *Parukářka* pub was to create a space for free cultural events, socializing and refreshment. Thanks to its attractive outdoor surroundings, the number of visitors to the pub multiplies in spring and summer time. The pub has no wait staff and people often stand in long queues to get their beer or tap lemonade either inside the cabin or in a small booth outside of the pub, typically at the sound of rock or punk music playing from the speakers. During warm weather,

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.parukarka.cz/kauza.php>

people are scattered around the whole park, sitting and lying on the grass, or picnicking on blankets, playing various games or musical instruments. Many people come with their children and dogs, freely running around and playing with each other. The place is popular for its relaxed unpretentious atmosphere. The pub and the adjacent park host live music performances, summer film screenings, festivals, fairs, competitions, carnivals, races, games, etc. It is also possible to attend celebrations and festivities on the occasions of Christmas, New Year's Eve, St. Nicolas, etc. Sometimes people meet in the park near the pub to do fire shows, or other cultural events, which they typically need to announce to the local authorities. In 2007, the spot was unexpectedly enriched by a newly opened club *Bunkr*, which is operated by a different civil group.

#### **Box 20. *Bunkr***

In 2007, a civil group *SKAJP* opened a new music club in the underground premises of the former antinuclear shelter right underneath the *Parukárka* pub. The space is rented from the municipality and operates without any grant support. It has two bars and two stages which can be accessed by a long spiral stair that has an indoor climbing wall in the center. Music genres played in the club range from punk-rock to techno and experimental styles. The opening of *Bunkr* extended the range of activities that can be pursued in the locality of *Parukárka*, and solidified its underground atmosphere.

**Figure 33.** Underground club *Bunkr*



Source: parukarka.eu

- **Financial support:** Neither the *Parukárka* pub, nor the civil organization use public financing for their projects. The pub generates its own revenue, while

the civil organization receives only small private sponsorship, which in most cases does not take financial form.

- **Conclusion:** Due to the problems described above, the *Parukářka* pub has turned into a rare example of an alternative and noncommercial space that even after almost two decades of its existence somehow still manages to survive in a prominent and highly desirable location despite various pressures from the local authorities. At the same time, the circumstances around the pub also serve as a good illustration of the contemporary forces that push on the displacement of non-profit and grassroots spaces and activities due to gentrification of their surroundings and due to the widening rent gap in the area where they are located. To many people the *Parukářka* pub is a popular refuge from the city that exists within the city itself. A place where people can feel free and relax without being subject to the omnipresent pressures of the commercialized city and polluted environment.

According to the latest information at the time of this writing, the local council in Prague 3, for twenty years under the control of the *Civic Democrats*, was overthrown and sent into opposition. The former opposition councilor Matěj Stropnický, one of the interviewees of my research, has become the new vice-mayor of Prague 3. This fact might significantly improve the situation surrounding the *Parukářka* pub.

## 7. Alternative spaces in Prague and the *right to the city*

In the introduction of this dissertation I suggested that “*spaces which embed alternative, grassroots and marginal cultures and activities are crucial for urban environments that are democratic and socially just, and therefore play an important role in the existence and consolidation of a well-functioning democracy with a well-developed civil society and enforceable human rights*”. People need these spaces, and it is important that they enforce their right to such spaces through their *right to the city*. This argument was supported in the theoretical Part 2. In Part 7 the perspective of my argument is used to evaluate alternative spaces in Prague and users thereof by placing them into four different contexts:

First, in chapter n. 7.1, I evaluate Prague’s alternative spaces in the context of their oppression by the two different ideologies which have been shaping Czech society during the past six decades: the political ideology of the former totalitarian regime and the economic ideology of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

Secondly, in chapter n. 7.2 I evaluate various groups of users of alternative spaces in Prague in relation to their attitudes towards enforcing their *right to the city*. Some users of alternative spaces take a more pro-active approach in defending their interest, while other social groups passively accept the logic of capitalism and the way it impacts the restructuring of urban space.

In chapter n. 7.3 I outline some basic similarities and differences between Prague and Western cities in terms of the relation of alternative spaces for non-profit culture and grassroots activities to urban development, gentrification and displacement.

In chapter n. 7.4 I critically evaluate Prague’s official documents, namely its Strategic Plan and the Conception of Cultural Politics of the Capital City of Prague. I compare them with how they are adhered to in reality in the context of the city’s attitude towards alternative spaces for non-profit culture and grassroots activities. I also try to suggest some possible improvements to the current policies which could help the situation of alternative spaces, as well as all their positive implications to the city of Prague and Czech society.

## **7.1 Political and economic oppression**

When countries in the Eastern Block became democratic and transformed their economies from centrally planned to a free market, the people believed their nations had finally been liberated from an oppressive ideology and had entered a new post-ideological era of freedom, justice, and well-being. However, the contemporary experience in Czechia has made it obvious that the new social order has many shortcomings as well, and that market forces can also be responsible for new types of oppression, injustice and inequality. The new political and economic system has benefited only some members of society; some people have profited, and other people have lost.

The key message of this chapter is that despite their indispensable role in overthrowing the totalitarian regime in former Czechoslovakia, the pursuers of alternative cultures and users of alternative spaces belong to the groups which have been oppressed politically during the former regime, and now economically in the current system. I will now take a closer look at the specific nature of the post-socialist attitude towards transformation into a capitalist society, and the role that alternative cultures have played in relation to their oppression. By oppression, I mean the inequalities and injustice which alternative cultures are subject to from the dominant society and societal structures. After, I will focus on the way in which the contemporary alternative cultures and alternative spaces in Prague have become affected by the newly imposed system.

### **7.1.1 Capitalism: a natural organization of the society or oppression through ideological economism?**

Due to the unsuccessful attempt of totalitarian Czechoslovakia to create an ideal socialist society, the Czech public has a particular relationship to capitalism. A market economy existed in Czechia prior to the Second World War. Its return after four decades of totalitarian rule was viewed as natural, unavoidable and desirable by most of the Czech public (Sýkora 1994, 2009). According to Hampl (2005), socialism was an exceptional case of disruption in the society's evolution and geographical organization, and the introduction of a pluralistic market economy acted as a correction, leading to the return of a natural evolutionary trajectory in the society. Such a view contrasts with Polanyi (1944), who conceptualized the

market economy as an unnatural system of rational behavior artificially constructed by western societies.

The logic behind the way of thinking described above enabled the particularly rapid and radical implementation of capitalism into Czech society, including its concomitant contradictions and inequalities. The general enthusiasm of the liberated population was taken advantage of by employing shock therapy as the means of transforming the country; state control over trade, prices, and the currency was immediately lifted, public assets soon began to be privatized, and the system of state subsidies underwent a radical transformation. However, for the most part, everything took place without the government appropriately addressing the social dimension of the newly implemented changes. Early in the transformation period Sýkora alerted: “The rapid liberalization has helped to establish the Czech economy as a part of the world economic system; however, it has not developed any appropriate mechanisms of social regulation to tackle the uneven impact of this integration on particular segments of Czech society” (1994, p. 1164). Sýkora pointed out that this “new ideological orthodoxy” was uncritically accepted by both the government and the wider public, and its implementation was exceptionally successful due to a general aversion to regulation and an elevated demand for material wealth by a society that had been long constrained by central planning and a shortage economy.

More than two decades after the regime change, the issues of social regulation still remain inadequately addressed. According to Sýkora, Czechia “has served as a playground for liberal economic strategies implemented through the neo-conservative policy of a strong central state” (1994, p. 1165). For a long time society tended to view the steps of the government as natural rather than ideological, but the ideology of a capitalistic takeover soon became palpable across geographies of all scales. However, most people were not aware of the downsides of submitting the entire society to the imperative of profit and economic growth until the start of the economic crisis in 2008 and the concomitant government reforms, austerity measures, and a general dismantling of the welfare state. In line with the broader context of global neoliberal restructuring, the Czech government intensified the subordination of society to the economic interests and forces of international markets, and thereby weakened citizens’ enfranchisement and the general notion of democracy.

However, people were generally unable to perceive the economic crisis as a consequence of the intrinsic contradictions of capitalism, and instead started to blame economic problems on the ubiquitous corruption of Czech politics. According to Horák

(2007), early in the country's transformation corruption became an endemic feature of municipal politics in Prague, where a massive influx of investment resulted in the politicians' endeavoring to disable public input into the decision-making process so as to provide themselves with personal gain (2007). With the onset of the economic crisis, more people started to understand that capitalism and liberal democracy can in fact exist independently of each other. Previously, only a few members of the society had understood that the economic relations imposed by the capitalist order are not natural forces, but a different type of totality, in which the logic of capitalism represents an ideology that nobody can escape from, and which serves only a small percentage of the population.

What also remains unclear to most of the public is how neo-liberal economies impact urbanization patterns which are driven by the constant need to extend territories for capital accumulation, and which therefore marginalize functions that are not profitable, such as housing for the poor, spaces for alternative and non-profit cultural activities etc. According to Neil Smith, this trend has led to the globalization of gentrification and "the mobilization of urban real-estate markets as vehicles of capital accumulation". These processes are problematic since they lead to capital centralization and "accentuate the contradiction between production and social reproduction" (2002, p. 446-447). The Czech public often assumes that the trend of markets taking over democratic decision-making is specific to local environments where the totalitarian legacies disable the democratic principles from being properly pursued. As a result, they criticize closed-door decision-making practices and corruption without realizing that neo-liberal markets have made urban politics less democratic around the globe. Harvey (1989b) refers to this change of urban politics as the shift from *managerialism* to *entrepreneurialism*, which basically means that urban governments have abandoned the practice of securing services, facilities and benefits to urban populations for the sake of market and inter-urban competition. At the same time, as Smith points out, the state is turning into "a consummate agent" rather than a market regulator (2002). In other words, neither national, nor urban governments try to regulate the way in which market forces impact urban populations or urban functions that these populations need in order to satisfy their basic needs.

### **7.1.2 Alternative cultures and their spaces: forever subject to oppression**

In the history of the Czech society alternative cultures have played a truly inconsistent and



ambiguous role. As we saw in the chapter n. 4.3, the totalitarian regime exposed the pursuers of alternative cultures to an ideological oppression, and thereby politicized them, turned them into opposition, and forced them to operate in underground conditions. Some of the members of the *Czech underground* then became active dissidents, whose dissenting activities were driven by the hope to live in a democratic pluralist cosmopolitan society which is tolerant towards all sorts of human activities, cultures and lifestyles. A society which is open towards new alternatives, innovations, progress and experimentations, and which does not oppress those who do not follow the dominant ideology. This hope, and the dissenting activities of the pursuers of alternative cultures, significantly contributed to the overthrowing of the regime and in numerous cases resulted in the participation of the pursuers of alternative culture in the country's subsequent transformation into a liberal democracy.

Especially during the rule of the president Václav Havel, one of the leading personalities of the *Czech underground*, the national politics involved many pursuers of alternative culture that had been persecuted by the former regime. Partly due to this fact, the first democratic decade in Prague provided relatively friendly and a welcoming milieu for all kinds of new activities. But with the capitalist system gradually becoming more entrenched in the institutional structure of the Czech society, the alternative use of various spaces in the city was increasingly interfering with the processes of privatization and the growing tendency to prioritize properties' exchange value over their use value. Closer to the turn of the millennium, these priorities became more evident as social inequalities deepened, and the capitalist logic started to heavily impact individuals and social groups which were not able to compete in a market-driven society, as well as on those members of the society who felt alienated from the logic, contradictions, aesthetics etc. of the new societal status quo.

When we take a closer look at contemporary Czech society, the pursuers of alternative cultures and users of alternative spaces belong to the social groups which the capitalist status quo exposes to oppressive pressures and leads to their further marginalization or their incorporation into the mainstream society and the logic of capital accumulation. These pressures are being produced both by market forces, which constantly push for "higher and better" use of urban terrains, and by the general discourse aimed at ostracizing those members of society that deliberately ignore or disrupt the standard practices of mainstream society, e.g. by squatting private houses, unauthorized land occupations, or by professing different aesthetics. This perspective allows us to see certain similarities with the pressures created by totalitarian socialism, which also drove pursuers of alternative cultures into hidden refuges or

out of the cities, and constantly pressed for their “normalization”, and which nowadays still persists in society despite its democratization.

The contemporary illusion of freedom and non-oppressiveness is in fact an ideological tool. Not all alternative spaces are oppressed in the same way, which creates an illusion that the society recognizes some of them as legitimate. But it is quite obvious that the oppression considerably varies on the basis of how each particular space deviates from standard spaces, and how the practices of its users deviate from the standard practices of the rest of society. These pressures also vary in relation to the distance of an alternative space from attractive territories of investment and economic activity. In other words, the more alternative spaces and their users interact with mainstream society and accept the dominant rules, the more mainstream society accepts them and vice-versa. At the same time, the lower demand there is for a location being occupied for alternative purposes, the less pressure there is for the elimination or incorporation of the alternative space into mainstream society and the system of capital accumulation. In fact, the only alternatives that the dominant society is willing to accept are ones which in fact are not alternative at all, or the ones that cannot interact with the rest of the society.

For simplification, I will now divide the oppression of the contemporary alternative spaces into two categories:

- 1) oppression through urban development and commercialization
- 2) oppression through legal system and societal norms

#### **7.1.2.1 Oppression through urban development and commercialization**

In Prague, where the demand for space is high, the logic described above implies that alternative spaces are basically trapped in between two options; if they are occupying centrally located parts of the city they are pressured by competition to become more profit driven or to serve the interests of the mainstream society. In such a scenario, they are risking the loss of their alternativeness, which they can avoid by relocating to a more peripheral area, or by getting rid of those members of their collectives who tend to lean towards commerce. In a peripheral area they can retain their alternativeness, but typically at the cost of lower accessibility for the users and visitors. In Prague, locations which are peripheral enough to potentially allow alternative spaces can be found only far beyond the borders of the city due to the high demand for land in the greater area of Prague. As a result, many pursuers of

alternative culture and users of alternative spaces opt for various compromises. Most often they occupy areas which are not located in central parts of the city, but their accessibility is still relatively acceptable to their visitors. In Prague, such areas can be typically found in former industrial zones surrounding the historic core, such as Karlín, Libeň, Holešovice or Smíchov neighborhoods. Most of these zones are slowly becoming gentrified. Yet fluctuations in the world economy and local real-estate development have created a multitude of time-gaps out of which some are suitable for various temporary alternative uses. Choosing such a compromise therefore serves the purpose of retaining a fair share of alternativeness as well as accessibility, however, typically at the cost of predetermined temporality and constant insecurity, or an elevated risk of becoming commercialized; closer to central parts of the city alternative spaces are under constant threat of being either displaced by urbanization, or exploited by capitalism which attempts to find ways of using their creativity and progressiveness in order to make profit, while inherently leads to their destruction. This phenomenon is especially entrenched in traditional capitalist countries, but Prague is slowly starting to experience it too. The users of alternative spaces are often aware of it, as is obvious from the following accounts:

*“In fact, alternative spaces are not being pushed away; instead they are getting swallowed by the mainstream. You can have a punk leather jacket from a bin, but you can buy the same one from a mall for x amount of thousands [czk]. Dox<sup>61</sup> serves as such example, it is part of the urban plan of Holešovice. They are revitalizing that place and they build some cultural institution there because of it. For us [MeetFactory] there is an urban plan ready too, by Sekyra<sup>62</sup>. But right now it is crisis, so it has stopped. The railway station is supposed to get demolished and there will be offices here, we [MeetFactory] will become only some sort of adventure, some kind of adventure tourism, where people will be able to touch the “sincere” stuff, the “fundamentals”, but it also works the other way round, it is emptying it...” (Jan Horák, MeetFactory).*

*“Most projects that perfectly function on a social volunteer basis at certain point start becoming implemented into the functioning of capitalism; some people are afraid whether the money for the project is invested effectively. Some managers are also attempting to use various tables and analysis to understand the way the original enterprise functions, and try to start running it in a capitalist way” (Kenzo, Cross Club).*

Sometimes alternative projects try to tackle pressing financial situation by occasionally

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<sup>61</sup> Dox is a center for contemporary art created in a former industrial building in the gentrifying neighborhood of Holešovice.

<sup>62</sup> Sekyra is a development company in Prague.

cooperating with various commercial actors. In this way, they are dangerously exposing themselves to the threat of not being able to estimate the borderline between keeping their original identity and becoming incorporated by commerce. This inability, combined with a fair share of hypocrisy or incomprehension of the meaning of “a true alternativity”, is obvious from the way Jindra Zemanová expresses her opinion of *MeetFactory*’s cooperation with commercial corporations:

*“Our aim is to never allow our project to become commercial, than it would lose its meaning. We are an international center of contemporary art, not a center of automobile industry. That is not part of our program. You will never see an event with Helenka Vondráčková<sup>63</sup> here. Citroen literally searched for us, because it matched their strategy. But the boundary of the ‘Koho cheba jíš, toho píseň zpívej’ (a Czech saying that tells one not to speak up against the person or a company upon whom depends their earning of living) is tricky. Art has always been financed by those that generate resources, painters have long been sponsored by the aristocracy. Contemporarily, it is also possible to use municipal public resources, as well as private money in the form of entrance fees, or in the form of commercial donations. If we were used as a billboard for advertising we have to make sure that we remain who we are, not who they are, we must keep our own character. We appreciate each commercial offer since we are still dealing with a budgetary deficit. From this perspective, there have not been too many commercial offers. But if commercial events took place here too often there would be no space left for our program and we would just become a commercial showroom, not a center of free-spirited young talented art. Those twenty or thirty spectators always have a priority over some million...” (Jindra Zemanová, *MeetFactory*)*

As we can see the account of Jindra Zemanová is full of contradictions. *MeetFactory* is an exemplary case of a project that uses “alternativeness” only as a label that sells, not as a concept that the project truly adheres to. Zemanová’s account shows that such a paradoxical situation is very hard to justify, and *MeetFactory* has definitely stepped over the imaginary borderline between alternative and incorporated.

However, not all alternative spaces are so easily commercially exploitable. Some of them are too marginal and therefore uninteresting to mainstream society. Many even actively oppose their own commercialization. Such alternative spaces than usually cannot count on the longevity of their projects. And even though the users of alternative spaces are typically flexible people, who do not mind constant mobility, temporality and insecurity is often harmful to their activities as it prevents them from planning ahead, and discourages them from investing their money and time into the much needed repairs of their properties. The accounts of Omri Goz from *Hala C* and Jakub Nepraš from *Třafačka* testify to the oppressiveness of

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<sup>63</sup> Helena Vondráčková is a famous Czech singer who has been active since 1960s.

the economic relations alternative spaces must deal with in gentrifying areas:

*“The main problem was that we could never do any long-term plans, it was a huge problem, not just financially, but in general. We didn’t know what to do there, should we build toilets? Should we build other things? It terribly slowed us down; the most interesting projects require time. And we never knew, we could always plan only two months ahead. It was really hard” (Omri Goz, Hala C).*

*“We are not doing many reconstructions, because everything is supposed to get demolished soon and we have been living with this reality since 2006. But thanks to the financial crisis the demolition keeps getting postponed, as you know. Had I known in the beginning, that we would stay here for five years instead of just two, I would have invested into a lot more things here. The loft, the working-room, the studio, the terrace and so on...” (Jakub Nepraš, Trafačka).*

Cultural activities and working conditions in both *Hala C* and *Trafačka* have been almost entirely subject to financial interests beyond the control of the users of these spaces. Their inability to fix their spaces then makes the existence of their alternative projects even less desirable to mainstream society. Paradoxically, the socially undesirable economic crisis can benefit alternative spaces; *Trafačka* shows the constant insecurity within an economic crisis can produce a provisional redemption from the threat of displacement, by securing renewals of their annual contract with the leaser.

**Figure 33. and 34.** *Věříme v Krizi (We Believe in Crisis)* exhibition in *Trafačka*



Photo: Tomáš Tesař and insidekru.phatbeatz.cz

This paradoxical benefit of the economic crisis was curiously embraced by the *Trafačka*

collective in September 2009 by launching an exhibition of big format pictures called *Věříme v Krizi* (*We Believe in Crisis*), which reflected the fact that economic decline may in fact bring prosperity into other areas of human activity. This also implies that conventional capitalist relations and urban development may in fact destroy true creativity and disable grassroots experimentation and innovativeness. In this light, Prague is undergoing deliberate urban stagnation and decline rather than development and progress.

#### **7.1.2.2 Oppression through the legal system and societal norms**

Almost all alternative spaces in Prague that this project deals with are legal, or in some cases semi-legal. In Czechia, whose legislative does not tackle the term “squatting”, all political and cultural projects that consist of inhabiting abandoned and underused buildings have been treated as unauthorized occupations or usages of private properties (Růžička 2006, p. 30), and therefore by the end of the first decade of the third millennium, all squat projects have been wiped off the face of Prague. Unless the legislature or the attitude of the general society changes, Prague’s squatters will most likely end up with only two options; they can either start their projects in legally rented spaces, which basically means abandoning the idea of squatting, or they can try to come to an agreement with various property owners and practice squatting in a semi-legal way. The squatters in Prague have already experienced the shortcomings of the first option: the necessity to generate sufficient revenue in order to pay rent. As described by Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006), revenue generating activities divert the attention of the users of alternative spaces from their alternative projects. One of the squatters in Prague described the downsides of the legal project of the *DIS Centrum*, which makes obvious Hodkinson and Chatterton assertion:

*“The members of the collective are a wide spectrum of different types of people, there are anarchists, freetekno people, and they all share the alternative lifestyle, which is only one kind of political statement. The other one is a little bit missing in DIS Centrum, the communication with the outside, I miss some kind of social outreach, which is the result of how the collective is generally set-up. It is very hard to run a space if the space has to gain its subsistence. So we end up devoting a lot of energy to at least make it work somehow. Of course, except for maybe a few individuals, most people would like to do some social work. For example, we wanted to do regular film screenings with debates about the movie, we managed to do that a few times and then it evaporated completely. If you want to do screenings with a discussion every week, you either need more time for that or there have to be more people who do it. The collective is not against various lectures, or providing the space for other initiatives, but...there are workshops once in a while, but it is very limited, we have lots to do with running the space, once every three months we have to pay for parking space, then we have to*

*pay the deposit for utilities, for two months you may be making some profit, and then the third month the saved up money goes back into operational costs. We must have the cultural program here, if people don't come for concerts, we will have no money to pay the rent"* (anonymous interviewee from the DIS Centrum).

Pressures on squatters' "normalization" are also produced by the mainstream post-socialist society, which has fully embraced the capitalist values of private ownership and individual responsibility, while at the same time lacking enough experience with alternative phenomena and social inequalities inherently produced by the capitalist organization of the society. It is obvious that the general public in Czechia predominantly perceives squatters as inadaptible societal drop-outs, who are too lazy to work and instead are parasites on the society and violate the rights of private owners. As a result, society rejects the whole phenomena of squatting, including their cultural production and social work. The answer of the councilor Petr Bambas in the cultural division of Prague 8, whose area of jurisdiction included the autonomous center *Milada*, is illustrative:

*"It is hard to define alternative culture; everybody thinks that the term stands for something else. My subjective impression is that for example squatting is not acceptable, it has nothing to do with alternative culture, and graffiti is unacceptable as well. In general, everything that violates the law or the rights of the owners is unacceptable"* (Petr Bambas, councilor in Prague 8).

Due to this reason, both the Municipality of Prague and the City Halls of Prague's districts refuse to provide squatters with a building for their activities, despite the fact that squatters could pursue various charitable activities that are not provided by the city. Private owners assume the same attitude, which has been obvious throughout the years of unsuccessful attempts by squatters' to negotiate with owners of various properties. The squatters have therefore created a website called *Squatterská realitka* (*Squatters Real Estate Agency*)<sup>64</sup> where they published information about all abandoned and decaying buildings in the city which could potentially serve as autonomous cultural centers. Recently, the squatters in Prague experienced the first signs of success in negotiating with the travel agency *Autoturist*, which owns the decaying historical mansion, *Cibulka*. There are promising prospects that the two parties will come to an agreement, which will be solidified in a mutual contract. Will that be a precedent which might change the attitude of the society towards squatting? This question will have to be answered in the future.

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<sup>64</sup> <http://realitka.squat.net/>

## **7.2 Struggle for the *right to the city***

As I mentioned in the chapter dealing with the concept of the *right to the city* (chapter n. 2.3), the ways in which people enforce their *right to the city* are very different and largely depend on the people's societal position, as well as on their general approach towards the status quo of the society. In case of Czech population, this approach has been largely influenced by the country's experience with totalitarian rule and with an unsuccessful attempt to create an egalitarian socialistic society. Due to this historical experience, the general public more or less uncritically accepted the transformation of the country towards capitalism, hoping that the leading role of market forces in shaping the society and its geography would ensure a naturally evolving society and truly liberal democracy. Nonetheless, most of these expectations were not fulfilled and cities became the epitomization of the materialization of failed hopes; once controlled by central planning and totalitarian regime, Czech cities have now become new terrains, absorbing the capital over-accumulated elsewhere, entirely succumbing to the interests of economic growth and the interests of the global and local elites. Many changes in the city have happened at the expense of the interests of the general public – the people as such.

In his study of the democratic development of institutions in Prague during the post-socialist transformation, Horak (2007) observed the way part of the public in Prague experienced their own powerlessness in the face of the entrepreneurial approach of the new democratically elected municipal governments; instead of becoming a city with a subsistent public input into local decision-making practices, under the pressures of the market, Prague turned into a battlefield of conflicting interests of the public and the politicians. This new phenomenon was described by Horak (2007) as “the politics of mutual delegitimation”, in which neither the politician, nor the civil organizations engaging in various political debates accepted their counterparts as legitimate participants in urban decision-making processes. The new capitalist context allowed the demobilization of most of the post-socialist society, and created a milieu in which politicians and actors in development could entrench various corrupt practices. The demands of the various civil organizations, which were trying to gain input into local decision-making, were lacking sufficient support of the rest of the public (2007). This was mainly due to the general depoliticization of the rest of the society, their increasing individualization, and their rejection of the general notion of “the people” as such. As Michael Hauser (2010) suggests in his essay on the “depoliticization and the gloom of liberal



democracy”, the notion of “the people” has undergone general discreditation in countries with a socialist past, and has been viewed as something that threatens individual rights and liberties (2010). Various works of research also show that the Czech conception of individualism and liberalism differs in comparison with the international conception; while elsewhere individualism is connected with personal responsibility and freedom, in Czechia it is connected with closeness – each person should be free and fend for him/herself, and nobody has the right to stand in his/her way (see Prudký 2009).

From this perspective, most people in Prague are likely to feel entitled to their *right to the city*. But in regard to the way they enforce this right, it largely depends on their societal position and on their ability to understand the structures of the society. Some appear winners, and others losers, in relation to the city’s transformation. Only some people are aware of the lack of democracy in the decision-making practices related to Prague’s development. Many people are satisfied by urban life reduced to a set of acts of individualized consumption, while others are not. Out of the people that the city does not benefit, only few are pro-active in trying to bring about change, trying to achieve various goals by the means of various tools.

The users of alternative spaces that this dissertation deals with are predominantly people who are not structurally disadvantaged; however, their interests are being marginalized by the interests of the developers and commercial actors backed by urban governments. They primarily feel alienated from the contemporary city and the kind of urban life it offers. Some of these people cannot afford market rents for housing or working spaces. Mere consumption satisfies them neither in the form of activity, nor in the form of consumer products.

The group that predominantly consists of students and the members of Prague’s artistic and creative communities usually calls for the right to use spaces where those needs that distinguish them as a social group from the mainstream society could be occasionally satisfied. They typically require affordable spacious premises that enhance spontaneous behavior, creativity, and a feeling of freedom; mostly spaces with unusual and unconventional aesthetics. The politically resistant groups, such as anarchists, activists and squatters, on the other hand call for the right to use various urban spaces in a way that disrupts the hegemony of private ownership and real-estate markets. They require the right to create self-managed spaces of resistance, which they can use for political organizing, social activities or for permanent occupation by those who want to live in accordance with values that fundamentally distinguish their lifestyle from that of the mainstream society. Last, but not least, this dissertation also looks into the issues which are dealt with by citizens and communities who

are simply trying to protect their alternative spaces from creeping development and modernization. Some of them display unusual resilience in resisting unfavorable laws and bureaucracy. All of these different groups differ significantly from one another, in terms of the way they perceive their own and other people's entitlement to their *right to the city*, and also in terms of the tools and strategies they perceive as legitimate for enforcing these rights.

### **7.2.1 Right to the spaces for alternative culture and experimentation**

The most frequent users and visitors of various spaces for alternative culture and experimentation are students and the members of Prague's artistic and creative communities. They are predominantly hedonistically oriented people with a strong sense for creativity and experimentation, and lack of appreciation for standardized utilitarian and unimaginative urban aesthetics created by capitalism. Some of them profess lifestyles which are unconventional and innovative. Most of them are not structurally disadvantaged; they are young, educated and often highly skilled; however, their socio-economic position largely depends on whether they are successful in what they do. Especially young artists and students often find it difficult to pursue their creative activities, partly due to commercial rent for art studios and spaces for cultural production being too high for them to afford. By taking over old buildings, these creative people claim their right to affordable spaces for pursuing their creative activities or working as artists.

#### **Ambiguous relation to capitalism**

The access of students and the members of Prague's artistic and creative communities to the spaces they need largely depends upon the overall economic situation; during economic decline it is easier for them to gain access to various underused properties in a time-gap between their former and future use. On the other hand economic decline also impacts on their ability to make a living from their cultural production; when the economy is not doing well, less people are willing to spend on art and culture. As a result, the attitudes of the students and the members of Prague's artistic and creative communities towards capitalism and their right to the capitalist city are very ambiguous:

*"If Trafafka was located e.g. in Shanghai, we would most likely get evicted in one month's*

*time and in half a year something completely different would get built here. Despite the fact that our destiny is clearly determined from the beginning, we believe in crisis... what can we do? All people from Trafačka go eating into the new shopping mall and have no problem with it. We are not going to be standing chained to the roof, when they come to demolish the hall. Is there any point in opposing the colossus that is decimating us?" (Jakub Nepraš, Trafačka).*

*"I just want to say that I am trying to see it in a rational way, to be a realist, not to make any illusions, like now that we have made three concerts here and around one hundred people in hoodies come here, we can't expect that some developers will say – hey, culture, cool, let's keep them here and let's redevelop it for them. No no, that is not the way the world works. I am sorry about that, you must function in that world somehow. That is the way it is. It also has its time, you know that this works here for five years, and then when it disappears, something else will be created" (Jan Kaláb, Trafačka)*

As we can see from the accounts of Jakub Nepraš and Jan Kaláb, capitalism and the real estate market are predominantly perceived as something people can hardly do away with. The way members of various collectives active in art and culture accept capitalistic relations is not unchallenged; however, most of them are also more or less uncritically embedded within the capitalist system. Therefore, they tend to accept the logic of the capitalistic market relations.

### **Excluding art and culture, not their pursuers**

The members of Prague's artistic and creative communities and students are officially not considered a socio-economically disadvantaged group; due to this fact, they don't perceive the peripherization of their projects results in their own segregation or exclusion. Instead, they see it as an unsustainable process of excluding non-commercial art and culture from the society:

*"It is logical that people who have the need to socialize in these spaces are looking for spaces which are increasingly further in secluded parts of the urban environment which are not yet occupied by developers, and which are financially affordable.... If the artists in those spaces are talented, their fans - if they miss their art in the city center - will follow them, visiting them will be worth the long journey. But then it will logically happen, which is actually already happening, that the Czech inhabitants will disappear, and the center will be overwhelmed by casinos. Maybe in the future the cycle will paradoxically reverse, it will be desirable to bring life back to the center where people live in expensive apartments and in luxury, but where no vibrancy exists, so then the come-back of such elements will be supported..." (Blanka Čermáková, Trafačka).*

The account of Čermáková proves that the users of alternative spaces for culture and experimentation generally accept the fact that non-commercial art, culture, and people who don't have financial resources, have no choice but to succumb to the interests of strong

commercial actors. At the same time, some of them believe that pushing art further to the periphery won't last forever and it will eventually once again play an important role in the society. Maybe this illusion of some kind of logical forces behind the market is the reason why most students and members of artistic and creative communities in Prague remain passive towards the processes that impact on their activities.

### **Short-term barterers**

Students and members of artistic and creative communities in Prague typically respect the main interest of commercial actors, which is to make profit. As a result, most of them accept that projects in spaces provided by commercial actors are only temporal and serve as a way of filling the time-gap in between the former and future use:

*"It is simply a temporary experiment, and if it lasts for ten years, it is still a nice thing. The deal with the owner was clear. I cannot fight and refuse to leave, and make them evict us"* (Alberto di Stefano, Karlín Studios).

*"It all started by a one year project and we were meant to leave once they need it. It was a gentlemen's deal between me and Mr. Malý. So there is absolutely no way I could dream of some people making fire here in the backyard and living here for zero money. This is the romantic idea which cannot work, because from the beginning there has been this deal. So I will never fight for it, because I accepted the offer as it was, I said clearly we would leave when they need it, they are letting us stay here for almost nothing, so I would be stupid to suddenly turn against them"* (Jan Kaláb, Trafačka).

From the accounts above, we can see that both the users of *Karlín Studios* and the users of *Trafočka* are ready to leave whenever a new investment opportunity for the property they are using occurs. Most agreements between the creative collectives in Prague and private owners of their spaces take the form of barter that the temporary users refuse to break as they see the provision of the space as a generous favor from the owner.

### **Relying on the governments**

Some people interviewed for this project suggested that the right to alternative spaces for art and culture should not be fought for by the users themselves. Instead, they believe that the richest commercial actors should behave in a more philanthropist way and see the support of culture and art as their responsibility towards the society. Since many actors in commerce do not feel such responsibility, the authorities on both national and municipal level should get

involved by either purchasing properties that already serve various successful alternative projects, or make provisions that provide commercial actors with incentives which make support of non-commercial art and culture more attractive:

*“People such as Bakala or Kellner<sup>65</sup> might be able to do something about it, but the Karlín Real Estate Group is probably not financially strong enough to be able to support it [Hala Thámova]. I don’t think they would deliberately give it up, the city would have to first get involved, but first the city would need a completely different leadership, different visions, but we know that the contemporary city is not interested, we know this from various initiatives” (Alberto di Stefano, Karlín Studios).*

*“Every developer has enough resources to support similar projects, but I also understand that it is not in their interest... It is also hard because for example there is no support for the developers from the state. It works in Slovakia, where companies can pay 2% out of their taxes to non-government organizations, or they could get help in getting all those permits... But the companies here have no reason, they have no support here from the state, so it is not attractive for them” (Linda Šilingerová, Hala C).*

Unfortunately, due to the situation of contemporary politics in Prague, the municipal help is highly selective, which is obvious from the cases of the *MeetFactory* and *Klubovna*. Both projects use municipally owned buildings, however, the users of *Klubovna* are students who face a lack of support by the authorities and also cannot count on their financial help, while the users of *MeetFactory* enjoy a cooperative approach of the municipality and a lucrative barter thanks to the good connections of the founder of the project, the artist David Černý, with politicians on the municipal and national level.

### **Assisting commercial interests**

The fact that some commercial actors provide their space for cultural purposes despite very little incentive for doing so is seen as something that needs to be appreciated, not fought against. This way of enforcing the *right to the city* comes at the cost of assisting various commercial interests; users of alternative spaces protect disinvested properties from further decay, thieves, and other unwelcome visitors. Thereby they make them more attractive for the mainstream society and the influx of investment:

*“We are paying them some rent, we are trying to cultivate it there, we are trying to make it work, we are more or less doing the job of a second custodian for them [the PSN], but that's*

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<sup>65</sup> Two of the Czech richest multi-billionaires.

*what the barter is about, it is a deal and on favorable conditions we get premises which we would otherwise have a hard time to find...” (Blanka Čermáková, Trafčka).*

In some cases the good relations with the owner of the property can result in new advantageous opportunities; e.g. in the form of access to other spaces, etc. In case of *Trafčka* 2, artists were given high-end studios created out of a former launderette, allowing the owner of the property to invade an unattractive area by investment and also to protect his capital during the unstable time of economic crisis. The consequences of this deal are yet to be seen, nonetheless, it is a clear example of artists gaining access to space via assisting the perpetuation of the existing practices of capital accumulation.

### **Exclusive *right to the city***

Students and members of artistic and creative communities in Prague often tend to voice the opinion that giving access to various pursuers of alternative culture to underused building is advantageous for their owners; keeping the property used and lived-in prevents the property from further decaying or being occupied by different unwelcome guests such as drug-users, thieves, or homeless people. Some owners of underused properties tend to take advantage of this fact; especially artists are then allowed to use vacant buildings and play the role of custodians and guards. Some artists, especially the ones with lower social consciousness, tend to see their right to newly gained spaces as their exclusive right:

*“When it was empty it was terrible. When it was still occupied by some people before, there used to be some underclass people, gipsy, workers, simply the worst rabble, so when this rabble started to move out, an even worse rabble came here, junkies, robbers”...*

*...“they [the PSN] can be grateful for our chasing out the junkies, in winter it was terrible here, they were breaking the doors open, they [the PSN] had constantly problems with them” (Jan Kaláb, Trafčka)*

The accounts above testify that some members of the artistic and creative communities in Prague are prone to socially exclusive behavior by declassing various undesirable members of the society and by denying their *right to the city*. In other words, they are justifying their presence in the property in the eyes of the owner by pointing to their ability to serve his economic interests by displacing the most disadvantaged members of the society. It is however important to say that not all members of Prague’s artistic and creative communities use the same rhetoric.

### **7.2.2 Right to the spaces of resistance**

Those who create and use alternative spaces of resistance in Prague are not many. Most of them are anarchists who are trying to pursue lifestyles, which are as detached from the official societal structures as possible and which also allow them to live in accordance with the values they profess. As a result, they opt for the strategy of squatting, various types of communal living, or nomadic lifestyles.

#### **Strong anti-capitalist orientation**

Anarchists and other autonomous individuals typically despise capitalism due to various reasons. Partly due to their own well thought-out, sometimes even theoretically backed up persuasion, and partly due also to their being failed by the capitalistic system. In Prague, I was following the destiny of a group of squatters, which consists of people who are predominantly young and most of them do not belong to any structurally disadvantaged group. These people simply refuse to gain access to properties in the conventional ways delineated by the dominant capitalism-driven social structures; these require either purchasing a property or paying market rent:

*“I don’t want to pay rent, I don’t have money for it and I don’t enjoy it. I refuse to pay fifteen thousand for a studio somewhere in the middle of nowhere; I prefer to create my own house. I work, but I want to spend my money differently” (anonymous squatter).*

Most anarchists and squatters refuse the idea of private ownership and therefore also the idea of housing as a commodity, and the necessity to devote one’s entire life to alienated labor, which is the precondition for being allowed to gain access to housing and other needed spaces. They believe that human life is about something more than spending it in a daily job whose sole purpose is earning a regular wage.

#### **Taking over abandoned and underused buildings**

Apart from rejecting capitalism as such, the squatters in Prague are also aware of the fact that capitalism produces a high number of empty properties in Prague, which their owners don’t use or take care of. These properties have an exchange value, but no use value. Anarchists and other people alike try to enforce their right to such spaces by taking over them and giving them a new use:

*“We had a house project with my friends. It was in Prague, in Jižní Město [a large housing estate in the southern part of Prague], in a gardening community, a small house. I think that the owners were probably dead, so nobody was trying to kick us out” (anonymous squatter).*

By taking over abandoned buildings, the squatters are trying to bring attention to the fact that housing is increasingly inaccessible, thousands of people are homeless, while various private owners speculate with their properties. They are leaving them abandoned and sometimes in the state of disrepair. This often happens even within Prague’s monument preserve, where the restoration of properties costs more than tearing them down. Some owners therefore neglect their buildings, leave them underused and disintegrating. Some of them also often repeatedly sell their buildings in order to make profit. As a result, the buildings remain disinvested and their owners don’t communicate with the local authorities. Such attitude towards private property respects neither the historical heritage nor the interest of the public. The squatters in Prague and their sympathizers have organized several public events aimed at challenging such practices, typically in the form of street parties, demonstrations and marches. The most significant was the occupation of the building in Apolinářská Street (see Box 16.):

*“The city center is more and more turning into a desert full of offices, expensive retails and tourist attractions. I was very attracted to the idea of creating a place in the city center where food would get distributed to the homeless people at weekends, where dozens of people could live and participate on organizing cultural and social activities, which would be free of charge and for anyone. And of course there would be space for subculture and counterculture. There would be a café and art studios. I think that the ideas what could be done there were very different among the people in the group that occupied the house, but they all thought it was a good idea to try it. Of course we knew it wouldn’t be that easy and that most likely we would soon get kicked out. Another reason was also the owner’s neglecting his duty to take care of his property. The Korf company not only hasn’t been taking care of the property since the revolution and under pretence displaced former residents, but also at least two times filed a proposal for the building’s demolition. The property is in a good location and in case it gets demolished it would be possible to build for example a very profitable office building or a residential building with luxurious apartments. But the spa building from the era of the First Czechoslovak Republic has got its architectural qualities. It is not a unique case of abusing ownership, in Prague this is a very wide-spread and well-tested practice of the developers. We also wanted to draw attention to the idea of squatting as a positive alternative. And I think that there was some at least partial success in achieving that” (Lenka Kužvartová, university student and an occasional squatter).*

### **Unequal bargaining position**

Squatters rarely manage to get an owners’ authorization to assess their underused properties. Occasionally, they get permission in the form of an oral agreement, which the squatters typically cannot rely on. Squatters in Prague face elevated animosity of the mainstream



society and of the authorities who are against social groups that deviate from the societal norms and that disrespect the most precious of the values of the ruling party, the sacrosanct private ownership:

*“We were trying to start a project on the basis of an oral agreement with the company. We were living in a hangar and in two rooms. We also built two rooms. It was supposed to be an open project, because there was an incredible amount of space. And then, the first event was supposed to take place the same week when the police evicted us. We called the manager of the property and she told us not to bother her, she threatened she would bring a suit against us” (anonymous squatter).*

The squatters’ negotiating position can be improved by cooperating with better established organizations, such as, for example, in case of the latest negotiations with the owners of the *Cibulka* mansion, where the squatters were partially successful thanks to the support of the civil organization *A2* called *Oživte si barák* (*Enliven Your House*), which increased the credibility of the squatters’ project by bringing culture and life into the decaying historical mansion.

### **Misunderstanding the idea of squatting**

The main challenge squatters in Prague have to deal with is the fact that the Czech mainstream society and authorities display a lack of understanding regarding the idea behind squatting. Due to its totalitarian “socialist” past, the mainstream society in Czechia still fails to understand the principal contradictions within the capitalistic system and tends to disrespect people who are not adhering to the dominant societal norms:

*I don’t think that squatting is something alternative, abroad it is completely normal. There was a coup here [Czechia] in 1989, but the people still live in the same way they used to live under communism, they just call it capitalism. And squatting was not possible under communism so it is not possible now either. Those who don’t work should not eat. In the West people have been failed by capitalism a lot earlier than people here, we have just started getting failed now. Abroad nobody cares if you are a squatter, as long as you don’t mess around” (anonymous squatter).*

As a result, local authorities refuse to cooperate with squatting initiatives, which was obvious especially after the eviction of the squatters from *Milada*, when none of the authorities in the city districts were willing to provide squatters with a vacant property, despite the official appeal of the minister of human rights, Michal Kocáb. The authorities see squatting as a

criminal activity that impinges upon the rights of other members of the society:

*“They are referring to alternative culture and an opinion which is different from us “normal” people. I am of the opinion that one’s freedom ends when it starts to constrain the freedom of someone else and alternative culture is nice only if it doesn’t disturb its environment. If a homeless person breaks into your apartment and start painting on the wall, it is also a form of art, but you will call the police without thinking whether the homeless person has or hasn’t the right to do that. And if you go on holiday or for a business trip and temporarily don’t use the apartment, that doesn’t change anything. You probably won’t negotiate with him about the fact that your neighbor also has a nice bedroom and you won’t convince him to go and paint on a wall there” (Josef Nosek, former mayor of Prague 8)<sup>66</sup>.*

The former mayor of Prague 8, the city district under whose jurisdiction the squat *Milada* fell, displays a lack of understanding of squatting practices, as well as the obstacles that squatters face when attempting to run their projects in a socially acceptable way. Firstly, they never use properties that are abandoned for the short-term; they only use properties that have been abandoned for at least a period of several months, usually years. In Prague, squatting projects have been predominantly initiated in properties that had been abandoned for several decades. By this method, squatters do not constrain the owners’ right to their property. Squatters often use water and electricity supplies in an illegal way, although most of them would likely be willing to pay for utilities. However, they rarely do so because of the illegality of their stay and the nonexistence of a legislative action that would give squatting a legal status.

### **7.3 Alternative spaces in relation to urban development**

In the theoretical introduction we saw that alternative spaces and alternative spatial practices often play an ambiguous role in urban development, especially in revitalization, gentrification and development of disinvested urban areas; alternative spaces are known for their ability to pioneer risky and unpredictable parts of cities, thereby preparing them for the influx of investment and gentrification. When the status of the area changes, alternative spaces have to move somewhere else (see chapter n. 2.4.3). Due to this potential, alternative spaces and their users have been abused by practices that various economic actors, backed by urban governments, use for the purpose of urban development.

In Prague we can see some evidence of these practices, inspired by the West, which

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<sup>66</sup> <http://pokus.blog.idnes.cz/c/91961/Vila-Milada-byl-jsem-u-toho.html>

will now be discussed in relation to some of the basic aspects of the relationships between urban development and the alternative spaces in Prague:

### **7.3.1 Different gentrification, different pioneers**

The links between alternative spaces and gentrification in Prague are similar to those in the West, although the scale, as well as the relation to the main actors in urban development and the rest of the society is slightly different. In Prague, alternative spaces never take over entire streets or neighborhoods, they are usually scattered in individual buildings in different parts of the city, often unnoticed by the mainstream society, and often, in former industrial areas where gentrification had already been initiated prior to their arrival. It is important to note that the socio-economic stratification in Prague is different from that in the Western cities, mainly due to the socialist legacies reflected in the socio-spatial disparities, which are relatively low and local. Due to this fact, Prague has no feared ghettos or large-scale areas affected by unemployment or high criminality. Alternative spaces therefore don't make the area that surrounds them more attractive for mainstream citizens. On the other hand, they make it more appealing or acceptable for the more alternative students or young creative people, who had previously considered the area to be boring and not worth visiting.

In most cases, alternative use of various underused spaces was not initiated by the city or those involved in urban development, but by the users of the alternative spaces themselves. Most such uses were enabled by an intersection of the artists' interests and needs with a multitude of disadvantageous circumstances faced by the developers or investors, who were temporarily unable to use or redevelop all of their property. This contrasts with various Western urban developments, whose actors often practice actively approaching the potential alternative users and use them in their development plans.

### **7.3.2 Useful assistants to speculative development**

In cities such as New York it is quite usual for developers to invite artists to inhabit newly built condominiums and other properties in order to protect them while they are empty and waiting for the buyers. The case of *Třafačka* is slightly similar to this practice; the owners

there were temporarily unable to capitalize on their property due the global economic crisis and uncoordinated real estate development and gentrification in the surrounding area. As a result, alternative use in Prague is often allowed in properties which are subject to speculative development:

*“The PSN momentarily doesn’t have money to be able to do something about the disintegrating building. They invested into the property, and for the past four years they have been trying to redevelop it into one of the functions which have, in the meantime, emerged in the surroundings (apartments, shops, offices). As a result, the value of their property is increasing, but they don’t have an investor for them to be able to turn it into something meaningful. There is already Vysočanská Brána [a new office building in close proximity], right after that Harfa (a new shopping mall) emerged, so of course, it is a good investment for them, but the horizon of them making some profit out of it is being postponed. They must first discover what the area is missing, whether they are apartments or something else” (Blanka Čermáková, Trafačka)*

In *Trafačka*’s case, we can see a paradox, in which the owners are looking for something meaningful, something that the area is missing, while completely ignoring the fact that the area needs first and foremost grassroots culture and spaces for socializing. The speculators are blind towards this reality, and the development in their hands goes in a direction that favors the owner’s profit, not the improvement of the area, or the public interest. In such cases we should be able to rely on the role of local authorities who should hold such owners accountable, forcing them to act in the interest of the wider society.

On the other hand, the case of the abandoned historical mansion, *Cibulka*, can be considered as a partial success, since the alternative use of the mansion was finally enabled by the private owner due to his increasingly problematic relation with the authorities, especially the preservationists, as well as with inhabitants from the surrounding neighborhood, who had complained about the building’s dilapidation and abandonment. Due to heritage protection, the owner was unable to redevelop the building into a hotel, and finally gave in to the interests of alternative users.

### **7.3.3 Useful custodians and protectors of investment during unfavorable times**

In both Western cities and in Prague, artists belong to a rare group of potential clients who are willing to pay rent for dilapidated buildings which are undergoing a time-gap between the former and future use. They get offered low rent for a building which no one else wants, while

at the same time their role as valuable custodians are taken advantage of, as they are also protecting the property from further decay and from being occupied by drug users, thieves and homeless people:

*“To make it long term is impossible... The PSN belongs to the bastard Václav Skala, who bankrupted Skala Bank and stole 4 billion CZK (cca 0.2 billion USD) from the national budget. All he cares for is business. I suppose no agreement is possible with this man. I think he isn't even aware of the project Trafačka, he only knows that the building is supposed to get demolished and that they will redevelop it into some administrative center which he will make him profit. He doesn't care about artists, no way. The artists are only doing dirty work on behalf of him, they are guarding it and protecting it from the homeless, so that Skala has nothing to worry about” (Saša Dlouhý, Trafačka).*

In some instances, developers in Prague own large plots of disinvested land which they cannot redevelop all at once; typically in the inner city the ownership of brownfields comes with a number of various disintegrating buildings. To have such properties occupied by artists can be financially lucrative since the activities and cultural capital of artists is protecting, and even increasing the value of the property that would otherwise keep crumbling. Especially during the times of economic recession, when real estate development slows down and various developers face financial problems, allowing an alternative use of empty buildings may represent an economic opportunity towards investment protection. Creative users of alternative spaces tend to keep the entrusted buildings relatively clean, safe and lived-in. Some developers, e.g. Mr. Charles Butler from the *KREG*, are aware that the presence of artists might be beneficial and profitable for the whole development area, and therefore also for the future development projects of their company. In *Karlín Studios* case, the benefits are exemplary – the former factory building is surrounded by a complex of representative office buildings, but thanks to the care provided by artists, it makes a much better impression than in its previous state of disrepair:

*“I think that they [the KREG] are glad that we are there, that they have at least some money, each building disintegrates less when it is used rather than empty” (Alberto di Stefano, Karlín Studios).*

Alberto di Stefano would appreciate it if the development company could let them stay in the property over the long-term, but the main role of *Karlín Studios* is to protect the capital investments placed by *KREG* into the surrounding estates. On the other hand, the investment put into the building itself by artists is threatened. Since the role of the users of alternative

spaces is only that of custodians and protectors of private interests, private owners rarely provide their spaces for long-term tenancy. In fact, most of them are afraid that allowing temporary use of their property might disable their future business activities. As we can see from case studies in this dissertation, most deals were only short term and typically conditioned by artists' good reputation, such as the case of Jiří David, or by personal connections, such as the case of the *Kultra Jinak* collective. The collective claims that without personal connections they had no chance acquiring the space *Hala C*. In return for the developer's trust, they had to accept a relatively unfavorable deal; the *Kultura Jinak* collective managed to get a huge space for low rent, but the developer could profit from them protecting and cleaning the space, and from their willingness to leave whenever needed:

*They told us that we could use Hala C for one year. Before it was used for technical maintenance for automotive trucks, and so there were all kinds of oils, which we had to clean. We had to clear it out and clean it so that the hall could be multifunctional. We were doing that from June to October. Then they [the developer] told us that they had an investor, that it was over, and then they said that the investor had canceled, and it kept going this way the whole time. We always only perceived six months of functioning, and in the end we stayed there for three years. Now they are planning to turn it into a parking lot, it will pay off for them more than us" (Linda Šilingerová, Hala C).*

Contrariwise, Mr. Malý from the *PSN* decided to redevelop a former launderette and let the *Třafačka* artists occupy it for free and for a long term. That can be explained by the fact that the *PSN* is not a development company, and its owners focus on investment rather than development. Nonetheless, the philanthropic step is probably a strategy used by the company in order to protect its capital by investing it into real estate taken care of by the artists.

### **7.3.4 Users of alternative spaces as a tool of displacement**

In some Western cities alternative cultures are often connected to the displacement of the original inhabitants by passively enhancing gentrification. In Prague, such a connection does not exist due to the local nature of gentrification, as well as the different function of property tax when compared with North America. In Czechia, property tax is relatively minor in relation to other property costs, and does not vary across different jurisdictions as drastically as it sometimes does in big U.S. cities for example. As a result, a sudden increase in property tax can hardly lead to displacement. Instead, displacement may be enhanced via increasing

rents in desirable locations, which is often the case in central parts of Prague. There has also been one curious attempt to encourage the displacement of the remaining tenants of one single building through the use of alternative culture. This happened when the businessman, Petr Svinka, decided to provide free space to evicted squatters from *Milada* in his building in the historical center, most likely hoping that their presence would make the rest of the tenants leave, allowing him to redevelop the building into a hotel or some other commercial space. From an account of a tenant, Milan Smrž, we can see that the plan to expel tenants by introducing squatters turned against the owner himself. Petr Svinka also displayed a great deal of ignorance by embracing the stereotypical perception of squatters as intolerable societal drop-outs, underestimating the attention the media, focused on the squatters' eviction, would subsequently pay his treatment of the tenants in his house:

*"I know from some people that in Berlin it is a common practice, they [landlords] invite some problematic tenants, and then they hope that the original ones would leave. But we sort of ended up growing together with the squatters; I even made friends with some of them. We did some events together, we spoke together to the media without vituperating each other... there were some problems of course, sometimes there were messes, big dogs, or the music was loud, but we were always able to come to an agreement. Some groups of people that do not have such a negative label cause much more trouble. So I quite enjoyed it, the house was not empty, stuff was going on here, I thought it was interesting. Many times we visited them... I thought it was funny that there was an exhibition in the cellar where we used to keep our coal before... Now if Svinka causes problems again, I can call the television and three reporters will come here immediately. He turned this into a story. The squatters helped to make the problems in our house public... The squatters really unified us as tenants. We had already been unified before in our fight against Svinka, but the squatters really consolidated us" (Milan Smrž, one of the tenants in the house in Truhlářská Street).*

### **7.3.5 Urban developers in Prague and the new middle class**

The post-socialist society is still culturally homogenous and relatively conservative in relation to various alternative cultures. As a result, the ideal of the mainstream society, affected by four decades of a shortage economy, is still the sterile stereotypical spaces created by capitalism. This is obvious in the occasional attempts of the developers and investors to create spaces for art, culture, or even farmers' markets by placing them into sterile premises of standardized new buildings. So far, it seems that the developers and investors in Prague have not been able to embrace and understand the specific taste, aesthetics, and lifestyle of the new

middle class. Due to their ignorance and hostility towards alternative spaces for art and various non-profit grassroots activities, they haven't been able to use this urban feature as a source of inspiration for furthering their development plans.

## **7.4 Politics and alternative spaces**

Prague is officially proclaiming itself to be "*město kultury*" ("*the city of culture*"). Prague has every right to take pride in its historical and cultural heritage, which entices millions of tourists each year to experience the more than a thousand-year old city, full of architecture from different eras and narrow, obscurely romantic alleyways. Many tourists visit a concert of classical music by Mozart or Vivaldi, or attend the Jewish museum, or the museum of Franc Kafka or Alfons Mucha, etc. However, Prague is little known as a city of contemporary art or grassroots culture, and it is increasingly becoming reminiscent of a big open-air museum that lives off the fame of its past. After visiting Prague, tourists often head for Berlin, where they can find the kind of contemporary art and grassroots culture they cannot find in Prague, and which authorities in Czechia are still keen to avoid.

The current state of alternative spaces for non-profit culture and grassroots activities in Prague constitutes only one symptom of the local authorities' conservative, and sometimes even backward, approach towards the city's cultural politics. The city has a number of official documents that outline the direction of the city's development and the priorities of municipal politics in the area of culture, art, grassroots initiatives, and community development. In relation to alternative spaces for culture and grassroots activities, the most important documents are the city's Strategic Plan and the Conception of Cultural Politics of the Capital City of Prague. In both cases, we find major discrepancies between the official documents and the reality.

There are a number of obvious flaws in the general approach of Prague's municipal politics, as well as the approach of the Ministry of Culture. The official documents contain information on issues that need to be improved or further developed, and on issues that need to be avoided or eliminated. Alternative spaces could play an important role in tackling many of these issues; however, local authorities not only fail to recognize this potential, but often constrain it or eliminate it.

In the following chapters, I will take a closer look at Prague's Strategic Plan and at the



Conception of Cultural Politics. I will discuss selected official policies and goals, outlined in these two documents, which concern issues that alternative spaces do, or could help to improve. I will evaluate the extent to which the authorities consider the potential of the alternatives spaces that currently exist or could exist in the city of Prague, in regards to the implementation of the official policies and goals. Using quotations of the people interviewed as part of my research, I shall discuss in more detail some of the main shortcomings of the authorities approach and make a few suggestions that might help to achieve the official goals, and improve the current policies, as well as the overall situation of alternative spaces in Prague:

#### **7.4.1 Prague's official documents: The Strategic Plan and the Conception of Cultural Politics**

The **Strategic Plan (SP)**<sup>67</sup> of the capital city of Prague “is a long term conceptual document which determines goals, priorities, and ways of solving key issues of city development for a period of 15–20 years” (URM<sup>68</sup>). It contains a SWOT analysis, which deals with various aspects of the city's current situation and future development. The last updated version comes from the year 2008. The main purpose of another official document, the **Conception of Cultural Politics of the Capital City of Prague (CCP)**<sup>69</sup>, is to designate basic principles, general goals, tools, medium-term plans and priorities of cultural politics in Prague. From both documents I have selected several goals and policies which are related to the city's culture, civil society, brownfield areas, social exclusion and inclusion, and citizens' identification with the city, and I will discuss the way alternative spaces in Prague could help in achieving their implementation or in preventing the officially recognized threats and weaknesses.

Among the many points in Prague's SP, we can find the city's official goal to delimitate and consolidate its position in the European metropolises market, and to create an image of a prospectively oriented, dynamic, long-term stable, safe and innovative city; an image of a “content city”, and a city that uses its multicultural tradition and cultural

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<sup>67</sup> [http://www.urm.cz/uploads/assets/soubory/data/strategicky\\_plan/cz2008\\_web.pdf](http://www.urm.cz/uploads/assets/soubory/data/strategicky_plan/cz2008_web.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.urm.cz/en/strategy-of-development>

<sup>69</sup> [www.proculture.cz/knihovna/downloadfile.php?id=584](http://www.proculture.cz/knihovna/downloadfile.php?id=584)

importance for increasing its attractiveness. According to the CCP, Prague wishes to be an open city, which respects the city's tradition and uses its historical potential, but at the same time creates conditions for new inspirations, trends and forms of cultural life and artistic production. One of Prague's official priorities is to stimulate and support creative artistic activity and to make the results of artistic production accessible to the citizens and visitors of the city.

At the same time, the city acknowledges that some of its biggest weaknesses and threats consist of the "concept-less approach and commercial pressures which are transforming Prague into a 'common' internationally unified big city", and in "the increase of alien influences which are exceeding the citizens' tolerance". In the SP, the city points to its own "inability to further its interests through coordinating activities and cooperation between public and private sector", "low level of cooperation with the businessmen and citizens", as well as generally "low participation of the citizens in decision-making related to public issues, the citizens' low identification with the local community and with Prague as a whole", as well as "citizens' loss of interest in public matters" (SP 2008, p. 16-19). The city proclaims that one possibility of tackling its various problems is through using experience and examples of good practice in the EU countries; however, this is usually not the case. The city wants to increase its competitiveness and sustain its tourist attractiveness by improving foreign cooperation in protecting the exceptional cultural-historical wealth of the city and in integrating multicultural activities, by enhancing permanent all-year interest in the city through supporting sustainable tourism, offering attractive off-season events and programs, and by increasing the distribution of tourist destinations within the monument preserve (the historical city center) as well as outside of it (SP 2008). In the CCP, Prague is also expressing its interest in supporting culture for the further development of the civil society; according to this proclamation, municipal bodies should support more active cooperation with the public, civil organizations, foundations and endowment funds. On the basis of this cooperation, the city hopes to receive feedback regarding the efficiency of its cultural politics and to flexibly react to new impulses (CCP 2010).

Many of these outlined strategic policy goals are unfortunately not supported and accomplished in daily practices. This is especially evident the city's attitude and approach towards the alternative culture and spaces in Prague. The SP shows that the city is aware of a number of free premises and areas in the inner city, such as areas of the large extinct industries and abandoned railway lots, constituting an opportunity for a new suitable use. The

city also admits that the current utilization of development opportunities in the former manufacturing and engineering areas is somewhat troubled, and that citizens in Prague are not held sufficiently accountable for the protection of property and the urban environment. Finding a suitable use of available spaces or increasing citizens' accountability for the protection of their property and urban environment could in fact help tackle many issues outlined as weaknesses, opportunities, or threats in the SP, as well as pursuing the principles and priorities outlined in Prague's CCP. Spaces which are currently underused, or used inappropriately by their owners, could help determine the city's official support of cultural projects that help the positive development of tourism in Prague, especially outside of the main tourist season, as well as enable Prague's influence over the officially desired preservation of the diversity and plurality of the city's cultural life and openness towards new trends in culture and art. Various spaces could also serve different civil organizations and grassroots' initiatives, and help the city in dealing with various issues mentioned in the strategic documents, such as the currently insufficient integration of disabled and people threatened by social exclusion into the society, increasing the city's support of local activities for specific groups of citizens (such as older generations, mothers with children etc.), or moderating the rate of socially troubled groups of citizens, and integrating persons from risk groups into the society. In such a way, the city could also increase the efficiency of its cooperation with the bodies and organizations concerned with the issue of migrants, refugees, homeless, and other socially threatened persons. In the CCP, the city prioritizes its support of offer allowing for the cultural self-realization of children and youth, and cultural initiatives that help integrate and include minorities into active cultural happenings in Prague. By providing available space to these various cultural and grassroots' initiatives, the city has an opportunity to reduce the passivity of the public and to increase the interest of citizens in public matters and their participation in the city's administration and governing.

#### **7.4.2 Official policies and goals in light of the approach towards alternatives spaces**

One of the major downsides in Prague's politics is the misunderstanding of the role that alternative spaces for non-profit culture and grassroots activities play, or could play in the overall development of the city, its civil society, and the city's overall cultural profile. Spaces researched in this dissertation constitute a positive and viable use of various brownfield areas

which neither the city nor private owners are able to find a suitable or more profitable use for. Some of these spaces have a huge potential for building local communities and for creating terrains that a wide spectrum of users can identify with. Most researched spaces have proven to be very rich in social and cultural capital, and as we have seen in the case of the extinct squat projects of *Medáks* or *Truhla*, some of the spaces have also provided inclusive environments for disadvantaged and socially threatened groups, or various local activities. Some spaces are also highly progressive and innovative, and could play an important role in furthering international cultural cooperation and tourism. The potential of alternative spaces is large and could be further developed if both the national and the municipal politics fully embraced it and developed it. Current legislation and policies should be revised in order to ensure the preservation, maintenance, or even the expansion of the number of alternative spaces. I will now take a closer look at the actual approach local authorities have taken towards alternative spaces, quoting some of the respondents interviewed during my research:

#### **7.4.2.1 Reluctance to support alternative projects: the fear of the unknown**

During the past decade, spaces for non-profit culture and grassroots activities have been disappearing from the central parts of the city. Despite this fact, the number of various alternative and grassroots initiatives and projects in the city is increasing; most of them facing a challenging lack of suitable and affordable premises for their activities. Due to various reasons, local authorities are reluctant to support these types of initiatives and projects. They typically refuse to provide them with municipally owned premises and obtaining public funding is also very hard.

This is mainly due to the authorities' animosity towards projects which do not generate economic profit and which are beyond their conventional experience. Many opinions attest to an unofficial tendency of authorities in Prague to support mainstream culture, while at the same time banishing or encumbering non-mainstream, non-profit, and grassroots projects in Prague. The attitude of the authorities in Prague 6 towards the creation of a student center, *Klubovna*, in a municipally owned building, previously a former nursery, is illustrative. The general feeling among the authorities was that a student project in a dilapidated building must inevitably result in the creation of a drug addicts' hellhole. Martin Skalský, one of the few progressive councilors in Prague 6, claims that most councilors in the city district of Prague 6 have no experience with low-profile grassroots culture and therefore approach all similar projects with fear and suspicion. Contrariwise, they tend to allocate overrated amounts of

financial support to traditional and mainstream culture, or events organized by the commercial sector. On that account, Skalský comments:

*“The strategy of Prague 6 is that they restore the big local theatres, for example the Theatre Spejbl and Hurvíněk<sup>70</sup>, and they feel like that this is the culture which they invest tens of millions (Czech crowns) into. These people have no experience with anything else. In the council, there were only two ladies who had experienced punk concerts and they knew what it is about, but the rest of them do not even know that there is such thing as low-profile culture; they perceive it as a negative thing, as a meeting place for drug addicts, antisocial people, a place where people will be getting drunk and make noise” (Martin Skalský, councilor in Prague 6).*

In the case of Prague 6, a quiet and peaceful residential district, local authorities tend to be suspicious of any unconventional initiative within the area of their jurisdiction, such as grassroots initiatives organized by youth. As a result, even community or cultural projects are seen as undesirable. With regards to alternative projects, the local authorities often see young people with alternative interests as uncontrollable societal dropouts. In such an atmosphere, it is hard to justify not only the idea of squatting, but also any kind of non-profit project that isn't destined for a mainstream audience.

Surprisingly, local authorities even have a similar attitude towards serious projects of contemporary art. Alberto di Stefano and Ondřej Stupal are of the opinion that e.g. the local authorities in Prague 8 and Prague 5 are not interested in art projects such as *Karlín Studios* or *Futura* gallery, most likely due to their lack of appreciation for art in general and their obvious preference for mainstream culture. Alberto di Stefano and Ondřej Stupal both claimed that, when regarding the provision of suitable premises for their projects, the officials in city districts are not even willing to negotiate with any non-profit interest. Instead, they approach them as if they were commercial enterprises by e.g. encouraging them to bid on various municipally owned spaces which are available, disrespecting the fact that a non-profit project can hardly compete with for-profit enterprises when it comes to offering the highest rent or buying price. It is therefore necessary to create provisions that would ensure non-profit use is not disqualified by commercial functions, especially regarding the use of property that belongs to the city.

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<sup>70</sup> *Spejbl and Hurvíněk* are Czech puppet comedy characters created by Josef Skupa in the 1920s. The puppets have had an international success.

#### **7.4.2.2 Speculation and failed heritage protection: the indefatigability of private ownership**

In Prague, we could find many idle properties that nobody uses or takes care of. As we have seen in Box 16., there have been some attempts to publicly criticize the authorities' failure in ensuring the accountability of the private owners who don't care for their property and leave them to decay. This is due to two reasons: 1) the authorities preach the idea that private ownership is sacrosanct despite the fact that private ownership is also connected with many obligations of the owner 2) the way the Municipality treats its own property is often very similar. As a result, local authorities aren't fond of providing municipally owned premises for cultural purposes, as they are hesitant in revealing information about the amount of municipal property that stays inactive, underused or even dilapidating. Denisa Václavová, one of the members of the civil organization *Čtyři dny*, which organizes a site specific festival of contemporary art called *4+4 dny v pohybu*, describes the reasons behind the attitude of the local authorities:

*"We have never rented anything from the Municipality, in fact, when we showed interest in using something municipally owned it was never made possible, because the Municipality doesn't want to bring attention to the amount of its idle estate. We encounter such an attitude even when dealing with developers and private owners, who don't want to provide their property, because if there is, for example, an inactive building in Národní Street, it's not quite all right either" (Denisa Václavová, Čtyři dny).*

Due to the Municipality's neglect towards some of its own property, as well as towards private owners and their disreputable practices, the city of Prague is wasting a possibility to use a number of interesting premises, as well as facing the continual disappearance of some of them, out of which some are listed as cultural heritage sites. The scarcest are now various historical industrial buildings. Some of them have served, or could serve cultural projects and, according to some opinions, the city should keep the industrial buildings, which are important constituents of the city's history, and permanently provide them for cultural purposes. The architect Alberto di Stefano from *Karlín Studios* is of the opinion that the historically significant *Hala Thámova*, from the year 1857, would be a great premise that should be purchased by the city exactly for this purpose:

*"The Hala Thámova would be an ideal space that could permanently host art, live culture, contemporary dance and theatre. But Prague first needs to have a different government than the one it has currently, then the city could purchase the hall for some reasonable price from*

*the developers. The developers are still the same people and they don't know what to do with it, I think that the hall should be on the heritage list, they cannot demolish it, so how else could they use it then for culture? Now they are renting it out for relatively little money, for various alternative events. It is an amazing space. At the moment, the most prestigious space for art is Rudolfinum, but that just does not suit contemporary art" (Alberto di Stefano, Karlín Studios).*

Unfortunately, in a city that speculates with its own property, fails to protect its cultural heritage, and tolerates the problematic attitude of private owners towards their property, we can hardly expect any progressive approaches towards various alternative uses of the municipally owned space. In such a scenario, local authorities not only fail with regards to their obligations towards the building stock in the city, they also fail to comply with various official proclamations in which they've committed to support a wide spectrum of cultural initiatives, social integration, civil society development, and other public interests. The local authorities' dogmatic endorsement of the idea that private ownership has to remain sacrosanct has resulted in an anarchistic situation where a number of wealthy actors and companies control the real estate market, allowing for the destruction of many interesting and socially valuable projects, such as the *Medáks* or *Ladronka* squats. Both were evicted on the orders of the local authorities despite the attempt of both projects to create inclusive community centers with a significant societal outreach.

#### **7.4.2.3 Biased system of subsidizing culture using public resources**

The city generally displays a reluctance to provide spaces for various alternative projects. In general, it is mainly the city districts that lack sufficient knowledge about alternative culture and its importance to the society. On the other hand, the well established cultural projects and cultural institutions in Prague that aren't too deviant, and have a citywide importance, can draw public subsidies from three different sources: the Ministry of Culture (grant programs), Municipality of Prague (grant programs, partnerships, donations and financial subsidies for city districts), and from the budgets of city districts. Some of the subsidized projects and institutions operate inside alternative spaces. By providing them with public subsidies, the authorities are displaying their support for their cultural activities, not for the actual alternative spaces. The system of subsidizing culture using public resources has many defects, such as a lack of mutual coordination, unpredictability, non-transparency, and various other imperfections. Unfortunately, there is no database of the subsidized projects, and it is impossible to trace the trends in the city's attitude towards various types of culture. Due to

this reason, I was unable to use any reliable statistics for the evaluation of the city's support of culture and grassroots activities that take place in alternative spaces. As a result, the main inefficiencies in the system of subsidizing were discovered within the interviews conducted with the users of various alternative spaces that are subsidized using public resources. At the same time, I would like to point out the necessity of creating an internet database where information about how public resources for culture are spent, can be found. According to Kotous (2012), the absence of such a database is one of the main weaknesses of Prague's cultural politics. Public resources for culture are often spent ineffectively, and a large number of various projects are completely sidelined from public financing. A well-administered database could help keep a track of the way in which the city supports its cultural initiatives, and would potentially reveal various undesirable trends, such as the discrimination of certain kind of culture or applicants, etc. (2012).

I will now point to three main downsides of the system of subsidizing culture in Prague, which the users of several alternative spaces tend to mention the most often:

**1) No allocations for the physical condition of the building:** *MeetFactory* is an example of a well-established project heavily subsidized by the Municipality. The main advantage of *MeetFactory* is that the people in charge of it are famous personalities personally connected with the authorities. The much-favored artist David Černý was provided with a huge industrial building thanks to his connections, although it seems that even in this case the main objective of the Municipality was to get rid of its responsibility for one of its many decaying estates. The first cultural organization that showed interest in the old factory building currently housing *MeetFactory* was the civil organization *Čtyři dny*, but the city was only willing to provide the building, not the continued financial support of the organization's cultural program. David Černý was more lucky; not only was he provided the building, but his project also gets annually subsidized by the municipal grant program. However, despite his personal connections, the space was provided on condition that the artists use non-public financial resources to restore the physical condition of the building. The investment allocated through the municipal grant program is not designed for investing into the physical structure of the building. As a result, even the heavily subsidized *MeetFactory* faces a constant lack of financial resources for covering the restoration of their building. The project is therefore seeking sponsorship from the private sector, dangerously compromising the alternative character of its activities. Very similar dilemmas exists in the cases of *Třafačka* and *Karlín*



*Studios*, although the scale is different, and the collectives' resistant towards commerce much higher. However, desperate financial situations might lead to desperate solutions.

A lack of financial resources for reconstructions is also faced by the *Povaleč* collective who runs the project of *Klubovna*. Young students have been given poor support from the local authorities, leading them to use their private money to fix the municipally owned building. In addition, they had to face many bureaucratic obstacles while restoring the space:

*"We did everything with our own hands; we fixed the electricity, installed a new water supply, and new sewers... until summer 2010. In July, they closed us down because of bureaucratic reasons. We still didn't have a valid final building approval. We still didn't have it, so we had to keep dealing with it; it always takes long. By December we managed to get at least a provisional permit to run the place, but we still needed positive assessments from the fire department, from the environmental department, and in obtaining a sanitary permit, as approval of the electrical system. We had to deal with this paper work, but we are still only provisionally open. In order to get the final building approval we still need ventilation. It is just a slow jostling with the authorities. If they were not so slow we could have been approved a year and a half ago" (Jan Špinka, Klubovna).*

According to the councilor Skalský, the *Povaleč* collective are very successful and experienced organizers of cultural and grassroots activities for the local community; the authorities in Prague 6 should therefore appreciate the fact that such a collective is using a municipally owned building, and support them financially:

*"They [the Povaleč collective] made it, they were insistent, they had it all well thought-out, and they had the experience with that festival, so they knew how to make enough money to cover the operating costs, and all they wanted was just that building. That is not so much. Prague 6 should actually support them a lot more; they should fix the house for them and give them some money on top of that. Instead, they have a contract of indeterminate duration, but they never know when the house is going to be demolished, and at the same time, they give them a hard time with sanitary inspection and all kinds of other permits" (Martin Skalský, councilor in Prague 6).*

From the accounts above we can see that public subsidies are destined only for cultural activity and programs, not for investment, disadvantaging projects held in alternative spaces, which are often in a state of disrepair. It is advisable that the private sector becomes more actively involved in subsidizing these spaces, although it is important that companies restrain from abusing the subjects they are supporting for the purposes of marketing, branding, etc. The city should, on the other hand, participate in financing the physical condition of the alternative spaces which are located in municipally owned properties

**2) The struggle of planning ahead:** As we saw in the chapter n. 2.4 and n. 2.5, even well established alternative projects with citywide importance operate in a state of constant insecurity, mostly due to the unpredictability of the surrounding development and disadvantageous contracts with the owners of their spaces. Insecurity also heavily impacts their programs due to the general imperfections of the public subsidy system. This fact goes against the official proclamation that “Prague preferentially supports the activities that can be threatened by discontinuity or those whose cessation would threaten a unique and lively current form of artistic expression or cultural tradition” (CCP 2010, p. 9). Despite their high cultural quality, most projects researched in this dissertation are subsidized in the form of one-year grants. However, the one-year grants make it very hard for the applicants to plan ahead; it usually takes until March of the respective year to find out whether the grant application was successful or not. Subsequently, all allocated money must be spent by December 31<sup>st</sup> of the respective year. January and February are a period during which the projects operate without any public money, which in most cases represent money these projects are entirely dependent on. Until the very last moment, the pursuers of these projects don’t know whether their projects will be able to continue. Under such circumstances it is impossible to make any long-term plans. At the same time, the applicants for grants complain that the amount of allocated money often changes very drastically, dropping by as much as 50% in some cases. The fluctuating amount of allocated money on top of the general insecurity makes planning the cultural program even more complicated. Out of the spaces researched in this dissertation, *MeetFactory* is the only project that falls into the group of projects subsidized by a multi-year grant, and this multi-year grant has so far been more or less consistently generous. Ondřej Stupal, the art manager and fundraiser of the *Futura* gallery and *Karlín Studios*, complains about the unfair and non-transparent system of grant allocations, describing the way in which such a system limits the cultural program of his projects:

*“Why do Futura Gallery and Karlín Studios, which are together the size of the MeetFactory, get only a fraction of the amount of money that MeetFactory gets? We were many times thinking together with Alberto [di Stefano] that maybe we should reduce our activities in Karlín Studios, it is getting harder and harder, and you can feel it in the result. We should rethink how many things we can actually do with this number of people. Maybe we should stop some programs. But it would be a pity, to lose all those contacts... It is so hard to plan anything here [in Prague], because then they give you less money and it is hard to go back to the things you had already started... And in the West, they can see that we are never able to promise anything until the very last minute...” (Ondřej Stupal, Karlín Studios).*

From Stupal's account we can see another conflict between the Prague's official proclamations and the reality; according to the principles outlined in the CCP, "Prague presents its culture abroad and supports the development of international cultural cooperation" (CCP 2010, p. 9). In the SP, Prague is calling for the growth of the city's role as a place for activities of international importance. Despite these proclamations, the insecurities caused by the imperfections of the municipal system of subsidizing culture actually hinders the cooperation of different cultural initiatives with ones abroad, and at the same time creates an undesirable image of Prague as a city that ignores and works against its own cultural potential.

Because of this biased system of public subsidizing e.g. the civil organization *Čtyři dny*, whose site-specific cultural program requires the use of alternative spaces, finds it more convenient to apply for grants for individual projects rather than for a year-long use of a particular space:

*"Our ambition to get some industrial space ceased, and we also saw the direction of the way these cultural houses get financed and we understood that it is better to make individual projects than to try to get money and keep a house. Plus, we have never had any investment. Once, we even spent a year dealing with the Municipality about their offer to provide us with some space, the list included even the space of the contemporary MeetFactory. But they were offering us a space, but they didn't promise any continuous financial support. And I had worked in Roxy for ten years so I knew what it takes to have a house. And so our civil organization stopped trying to get its own space. In the end we became fond of discovering a new space every year. Although after sixteen, seventeen years it is ceasing to work, the spaces have either already been discovered, or somebody else discovered them, or they are built over, demolished, etc."* (Denisa Václavová, *Čtyři dny*)

The next important supporter of cultural activities in the city of Prague is the Ministry of Culture. Unfortunately, there is no official coordination between the grant programs of the Municipality of Prague and the Ministry of Culture. Typically, when one project gets funding from either of the institutions, the other institution tries to balance it out so that none of the projects stays without funding. Due to such systems, the low quality projects can never drop out and a huge amount of financial resources gets wasted on them, while the high quality projects have to survive with minimal resources, eventually burning out and ceasing to exist.

**3) Detachment of the decision-makers from the cultural projects:** Another problem of alternative spaces in Prague is the huge detachment of the decision-makers from the area in

which the decisions are affecting. For example, in Prague 6 the councilors continually refuse to visit *Klubovna*, despite the fact that the project is using a municipal property. It is likely that by keeping distance, the councilors are showing their lack of interest in the grassroots culture that takes place in the area of their jurisdiction. Possibly, they are also avoiding personal contact with a project that, despite their objections, managed to become a popular community center:

*“The evidence is that the councilors have been invited to visit Klubovna, but they never came. Klubovna is using a municipal property but the Municipality refuses to go there and see it for real” (Martin Skalský, councilor in Prague 6).*

Due to this situation, it is necessary that the committee of experts in the area of culture consist of a wider spectrum of people who are engaging in different types of culture, or people who have extensive knowledge of all types of culture – from classical and traditional to alternative and experimental. These experts should be in touch with the actual activities of cultural institutions and projects in order to be able to decide whether these deserve to be subsidized by public resources. The quality of the projects should not be assessed on the basis of their ability to generate economic profit. In fact, grassroots projects are typically less financially demanding than commercial ones, and at the same time are more inclusive and socially engaging.

#### **7.4.2.4 Municipal ownership - constrain or a wasted opportunity?**

According to some opinions, the city should put forth more effort in saving threatened buildings which serve, or could serve for interesting alternative projects, for example by purchasing them from their current owners. However, the city of Prague also disposes of its own properties, which are available and could be used in a new alternative way. It is advisable that these properties serve non-profit and cultural purposes, especially in locations that are in high demand (e.g. downtown areas), as well as serving some of the goals outlined in the city's strategic documents, or any other kind of legitimate and socially advantageous purpose. In such a way, various initiatives could for example ensure housing for the homeless, spaces for the activities of civil organizations, or spaces for fairs, exhibitions, community meetings, public film screenings, etc.

However, in some cases municipal ownership can also constitute a problem. In the case of *MeetFactory* we saw the way in which the city outsourced the responsibility to restore

its dilapidated property to artists at their own expense. Jindra Zemanová held that the best would be if the city sold the building to the artists, as it would allow them to finance the restoration of the building through EU funds; the fact that *MeetFactory* is part of a municipally owned brownfield disqualifies the whole project from applying for EU funds within the National Strategy of Brownfield Regeneration; the city of Prague does not participate in the National Strategy program and tackles the regeneration of its brownfields through the activity of private investors (Sýkorová 2007).

One of the main constraints is that the city does not sufficiently appreciate the usefulness and significance of alternative spaces, including *MeetFactory*. Jindra Zemanová therefore believes that *MeetFactory* must continually work at maintaining its good reputation in order to avert any danger the project will become defunct, attempting to do so by pointing to the project's usefulness from the perspective of its cultural value, as well as from the perspective of its commercial values, such as the project's role in gentrification and sanitization:

*“Our characteristic is to be reliable, to stay fresh, to persist, and to convince the owner of the house that MeetFactory is a valuable project. Before there were homeless people, a lot of stolen material, tons of spaghetti insulation, and now something completely different is going on here. The locality has gained a new quality of life, retired people come here for summer cinema, it has a catchment importance, alongside the potential as a brownfield and so on...”* (Jindra Zemanová, *MeetFactory*).

Although the goal of this dissertation is not to advocate the existence of alternative spaces from the perspective of their usefulness for gentrification, tourism, or any other commercial and socially exclusive reason, it is interesting to see that even the profit oriented city does not seem to be able to reflect on this potential. The city is also ignoring the fact that alternative spaces could play an important role in creating the notion of Prague as a creative city. So far, Prague has been known among tourists as a beautiful historical city, where people come to witness the touch of the old times, but many contemporary travelers search for an experience that is completely different from the standardized heritage experience. Many visitors to Prague are interested in contemporary art, spontaneous local initiatives, or alternative culture – something that e.g. in Amsterdam or in Berlin, a significant part of the tourist industry is based on. Without destroying its *genius loci* and reputation as a beautiful historical city, Prague could increase its touristic attractiveness by creating an image of a vibrant and lively city full of new progressive ideas and the spontaneous activities of its citizenry. In such a way,

Prague would, not only attract a more diverse group of visitors, but also increase the number of their visits, extend the tourist-visited areas in Prague, and ensure the city's all-year attractiveness.

#### **7.4.2.5 Inefficient coordination between the public and private sector in supporting alternative culture**

According to the CCP, Prague preferentially supports those cultural projects and subjects whose creation and functioning cannot be secured by the for-profit/entrepreneurial sector (CCP 2010, p. 9). Since some form of substantial sponsorship by private companies is still non-existent, most cultural projects in the city are dependent on public subsidies. Nonetheless, establishing and supporting big projects, such as the restoration of an industrial hall for cultural purposes, is financially demanding. Considering the current crisis in the public sector, support from the private sector should be considerably more significant. Since the current legislation does not include any provisions which would encourage private companies to support non-profit activities, culture, heritage etc. there is a desperate need for some type of positive motivation for commercial actors to engage in philanthropy and charitable activities.

The *Kultura Jinak* collective, who tried to express its gratitude for being able to use *Hala C* by advertising the logo of *Sen development* on its website, suggests that charitable activities improve companies' reputation and their position in negotiating with local authorities. Therefore, it is possible to say that alternative spaces in Prague could benefit from an overall increased support of alternative culture in Czechia, ensured via the national legislative. It should be made more advantageous for private companies to support non-profit activities, e.g. in the form of tax relief, discounts, or various bonuses, etc. However, strict control must also ensure that private companies aren't deliberately creating their own affiliated non-profit sections for the purpose of keeping its profits inside the company. Actors in development could also be given incentive to provide actors in cultural and non-profit production with more than just short-term leases and highly insecure conditions in ruinous properties. Turning alternative spaces into longer-term projects would also increase their attraction to other private sponsors, who could e.g. sponsor work on the building's reconstruction, etc. So far, sponsors have been avoiding this type of sponsorship mainly due to the possible future demolition of the building, or the project's displacement.

## 8. Conclusion

One of the main aims of my dissertation was to introduce a feature of the city of Prague which only little is known about. My goal was to point to the existence of spaces that surpass the hegemony of capitalist spatial relations and provide a refuge for alternative cultures that either despise life under capitalism as such, or search for spaces that allow them to satisfy specific needs that cannot be satisfied within mainstream society. The spaces researched in this dissertation constitute an alternative to spaces that are conventionally available on the market, and therefore are referred to as alternative spaces.

My dissertation was looking at alternative spaces in Prague from the perspective of Marxist geography, framing them using the concept of the *right to the city*. By referring to the Marxian urban theory, I explained the way capitalism driven urban processes turn cities into places which are more suited for economic growth than for the many aspects of human life, and therefore constrain people's ability to satisfy a multitude of their basic needs, including their need to create vibrant, diversified and livable urban environments, which they can fully enjoy and identify with without having to succumb to the imperative of capital-accumulation. The concept of the *right to the city* was used to show that people, despite their socio-economic position, have the right to rise up against a city driven by capitalist forces, and to transform it into a place where the basic needs and dignity of each member in society has a priority to the interests of the political and economic elites. By combining the Marxist structuralist approach with a focus on the human agency, I attempted to manifest the importance of people's ability to employ their imagination in surpassing the conventional mode of rationalizing urban space through capitalist relations. Through the ability to see the fundamental contradictions within the capitalist production of urban space, we can justify the existence of alternative spaces for culture and grassroots activities in Prague, despite the many economic pressures that are, in a seemingly rational way, pushing for their destruction, displacement, or incorporation into the mainstream. The people have the right to resist the forces of capitalism and to create new alternatives; people have the right to create new alternatives, and to inhabit and use alternative spaces. A truly democratic open society ought to provide people with such a right in order to prevent further growth of social inequalities, to retain social peace, and therefore, also the legitimacy of its democratic and open character.

As I showed in this dissertation, alternative spaces and their users in Prague are under

economic, political and societal pressures, which are pushing to have them incorporated into the mainstream. In the theoretical introduction, I explained that in order to constitute true alternatives, alternative spaces cannot be fully incorporated by the mainstream; in fact, in order to remain alternative they are bound to deviate from the generally recognized societal norms. The way alternative spaces deviate from these norms are different; drawing from Merton's theory of social deviation, I divided these spaces into several categories based on how they deviate from the established societal standards; there are spaces which are conformist, innovative, ritualist, retreatist, and rebellious. I then created my own categorization of alternative spaces based on their purpose, where the main dividing line was between spaces that people use for the purpose of survival, and spaces that constitute a deliberate choice of spatial arrangement. I also designed a categorization of alternative spaces based on the rate of their deviance from the legal system of the dominant society and from the main driving force of the society represented by the system of capitalism accumulation. Spaces that are autonomous and illegal display the highest rate of deviance from the standard society, while the legal ones that are incorporated by the system of capital accumulation are blending with the mainstream. This type of categorization was later used for dividing the case studies researched in Prague. Regarding the purpose of the alternative spaces, the case studies in my dissertation focused only on those spaces that were the outcome of the people's deliberate choice, not an outcome of a pressing life situation.

The aim of my dissertation was also to point out the way in which alternative spaces developed throughout the changing historical context of Czechoslovakia and Czechia. The empirical part of my dissertation started by pointing to the changing historical context, which showed that despite the changing characteristics of alternative spaces their true essence has remained the same – alternative spaces have always constituted places which are different from the mainstream, be it in the sense of their autonomy and independence, or in the sense of their non-adherence to the options delineated by the law. My objective was to demonstrate, using the example of alternative spaces and spatial practices, that despite the democratization of our society there are still many undemocratic and oppressive practices aimed against non-dominant features in the society. While the formerly oppressed members of the Czech *underground* are nowadays glorified for their dissenting activities which helped to overthrow the totalitarian regime, those who are opposing or rejecting the current social order and dominant lifestyle, values, norms and aesthetics imposed by the allegedly democratic regime, are again subject to oppression. Replacing totalitarian “socialism” with the free market has



basically meant an imposition of a new totalitarian version of capitalism, sometimes also labeled as “economism”, whose biggest threat consists in the people’s inability to identify it as ideological and illogical. As a result people have resigned the idea that there might be a different alternative.

By placing alternative spaces in three different political-economic eras, on separate maps of Prague, we could read some indications as to how these spaces interacted with the mainstream society in each one of the eras, and in what way these interactions determine the localization of these spaces in the city. Under the totalitarian socialism spaces for alternative activities had to be under cover and their position within the city was not constrained by market rents. As a result, most pursuers of alternative activities were meeting in the central part of the city, the most accessible for everyone, and which had the biggest concentration of pubs and other similar enterprises. The oppression of these people consisted of the constant threat of being revealed by the secret police. The transformation period after the revolution was anomalous in itself – but in some ways also the most ideal; shortly after the country’s liberation the concentration of alternative spaces in the downtown area expanded due to the sudden availability of various spaces which could be used in new alternative ways, as well as a feeling of freedom, enthusiasm and tolerance which shortly prevailed in the society. The effect of a new neoliberal market rule was delayed by the transformation period, but became more evident in the localization of the contemporary alternative spaces after the turn of the millennium. Since the year 2000, alternative spaces started to be condemned to disinvested spaces, ruins, empty buildings, and other properties momentarily unsuitable for capital accumulation. Currently, they are predominantly located on the edge of the historical core, but the tendency is to push them further away by means of urban development, or to destroy the essence of their activities through their gradual commercialization. The alternative spaces of resistance, which openly try to disrupt the societal norms and legal system that prioritize private ownership over the interests of the society, are subject to even bigger oppression, which is obvious from the map that shows the number of the spaces of resistance which have already ceased to exist during the past decade. Their cessation is caused by the same legal system and societal norms which these spaces are trying to resist or fight.

The main content of the empirical part of my dissertation was focused on case studies of select alternative spaces that existed during the conduct of my research. Within the category of deliberately chosen alternative spaces, I focused on the spaces that serve alternative culture and experimentation, and on spaces of resistance. These selected categories

of spaces in Prague have a lot in common; they are both mainly used by young people, and both of them are predominantly focused on cultural production, various spontaneous and grassroots activities, and socializing in unusual settings of former industrial spaces, abandoned buildings, or illegally occupied land. The users of the spaces in different categories differ from each other as well, but some of them also mix together. Especially in the past few years, I was able to observe occasional cooperation and mutual approximation between the resistant squatters and the more hedonistic members of Prague's artistic and creative communities. In my opinion, their approximation stems from a mutual shared interest in creating and using alternative spaces. Both groups have been recently attempting to enforce their right to the increasingly capitalist city, as well as to the decreasing amount of urban space that enables them to pursue their alternative activities or lifestyles, and satisfy their aesthetic and social needs. The empirical part of the dissertation divides the selected alternative spaces, which are functional or have functioned during the past decade, on the basis of the rate of their deviance from the mainstream society; in terms of their deviance they are ranging from legal to illegal and from incorporated to autonomous. I tried to make the information about the case studies comparable by focusing on a number of selected characteristics about each selected space: these characteristics included descriptions of property, users, providers of property and the conditions of use, the surroundings, descriptions of how the new alternative spaces were established, the way they were financed, and a short conclusion of each case. I found that all spaces for alternative culture and experimentation have had a legal status, and differed mainly in terms of their approximation towards commerce. On the other hand, I provide a description of several spaces of resistance, out of which most have been occupied by more or less the same group of people, but these people have been constantly shifting in space and time, moving from illegal places to spaces which were legal, and than again trying to escape from the system by searching for new semi-legal alternatives. One space of resistance among my case studies, *Parukářka*, has been specific and different from other case studies; it has been resistant towards the local authorities attempting to close it down, but also rather neutral as regards its stance towards capitalism.

The end of the empirical part is devoted to an evaluation of the alternative spaces in Prague from the perspective of the right to city. I focused on the oppression of alternative spaces throughout Czechoslovak and Czech history, concluding that the oppression of alternative spaces in Prague has lasted despite the changing political-economic regime. One of the reasons behind this continual oppression is the specifically Czech tendency to embrace

each social order in a dogmatic way that doesn't allow for any alternatives to the hegemonic order. The same way the authorities established one of the most oppressive "socialist" systems in the Soviet block, in the new era they have subject the country to one of the most dogmatic neoliberal rules. From the attitude of the Czech society towards alternative spaces it is obvious that a truly open democracy and vibrant and tolerant environments have yet to be created.

The second part of my evaluation focused on the way in which various groups of users of alternative spaces in Prague deal with the oppressive environments and in what ways they struggle for their *right to the city*. In this part, I outlined the main difference between groups that consists of students and members of artistic and creative communities in Prague, and squatters. Despite the fact that both groups face a decreasing amount of available space for their activities due to the forces of capitalism, their relationship towards capitalism is different. While the squatters are in strict opposition and try to detach themselves from the capitalist society, the students and young creative people in Prague are a lot more incorporated in the hegemonic social order. The alternative spatial practices of the squatters are an outcome of their refusal to respect the market rule imposed upon space and the idea of unchallenged private ownership, while the practices of the students and members of artistic and creative communities in Prague can be understood as a way of profiting from various loopholes in the system which allow them to occasionally satisfy some of their specific needs and tastes, while remaining entrenched in the society ruled by market forces. A specific case is the users of *Parukářka*, who consist of a wide range of people from the surrounding areas, who don't have any commonly shared values or lifestyles, but together enforced their *right to the city* by means of resistance against the authorities and by refusing to succumb to their displacement.

One of the questions I wanted to answer in my dissertation was how the relationship between urban development and alternative spaces for culture and grassroots activities in Prague are similar to those in Western cities. The main differences stem from Prague's post-socialist character, due to which its urban space and society retain distinct socialist legacies. While the development actors in Western cities often use alternative cultures and grassroots activities for the purpose of gentrification, or for capitalizing on their creative potential, most actors in urban development in Prague haven't yet fully discovered the economically exploitable potential of alternative spaces. My research has shown that alternative spaces in Prague act as pioneers of gentrification, although in a slightly different way. Most of them are occupying spaces in locations where gentrification had been initiated prior to their arrival, and

they have the ability to increase the popularity of certain parts of the city among other young and creative people. However, this potential is not used by the developers, who keep creating sterile stereotypical neighborhoods, full of high-end apartments and offices, without any intention of retaining the alternative spaces. This is despite the fact that the alternative spaces may increase the livability, diversity, and vibrancy of the redeveloped areas, as well as create attractive zones of creativity, innovation, and new progressive trends. Instead, most users of alternative spaces are only exploited as custodians and guards of the buildings which temporarily cannot be redeveloped. Like alternative spaces in Western cities, the alternative spaces in Prague are predetermined to cessation due to the continuing processes of redevelopment

My final evaluation is devoted to alternative spaces from a political perspective, especially urban politics, which both directly and indirectly impact on their existence. In the official documents, such as the Conception of Cultural Politics or the Strategic Plan of the capital city of Prague there can be found declared support for a wide range of non-profit and grassroots initiatives in the city, a declared commitment to increasing the livability and inclusivity of the city, etc. By focusing on the attitude of the Municipal politicians towards alternative spaces, non-profit cultures and grassroots activities, I was able to create a list of inefficiencies and gross demeanors in how local authorities adhere to the official strategic documents of the city. Not only do they not adhere to the official strategies but, in many cases, they contravene them and deliberately destroy some of the city's most successful cultural and grassroots projects, often trying to justify their actions by highlighting the deviation of these projects from mainstream society.

In the last chapter of my dissertation, I also try to outline several suggestions that might improve the current policies in relation to the alternative spaces. I suggest that it is important to ensure a better and more enforceable use of underused properties - both municipally and privately owned ones, and particularly in urban areas which are in high demand. Such properties could then create inclusive spaces with much needed social functions, and contribute to the production of environments that respect the needs of the society, instead of the economic needs of political and economic actors. At the same time, it is important to protect the existing spaces from destruction and cessation. Changes in the legislative should also be made in order to stimulate more substantial support of alternative spaces from the private sector. The implementation of such legislation would require the introduction of a rich spectrum of tax relief and other incentives for companies that support

the non-profit sector. Also, the current system of subsidizing culture using public resources needs to be more transparent, efficient, and inclusive, and less discriminating and inconsistent. It is necessary to create an information database tracking how public resources are used to support culture in order to ensure a more equal and efficient distribution. Last but not least, from a mainstream perspective, it may be advisable for local authorities to embrace the image of Prague as a creative city, and work on it so as to extend and enrich the touristic offer through the creation of a liberal, progressive, creative and socially inclusive city, full of contemporary art, new cultural trends, and the spontaneous activities of various local initiatives.

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After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, our society was hoping that imposing a market economy and democracy would bring wealth, prosperity, and a better quality of life, but also free, more open, cosmopolitan, vibrant, socially just, tolerant and progressive environments. There were hopes that Czechia would develop a civil society that would be entitled to democratically participate in political decision-making. However, the current oppression of alternative spaces in Prague by the interests of the economic elites and the global market, which was demonstrated in all 14 case studies, brings evidence that despite the noble goals, our society has not set out in a good direction. There are also, however, some new tendencies in the society, which my research could not fully reveal and which will only be shown in the future; as the economic crisis persists and urban development declines, the pressures on the alternative spaces researched in my dissertation have recently become somewhat milder, and due to the inability of an increasing number of private owners to restore their buildings, the squatters in Prague have also celebrated some of their first successes in negotiating with private interests. Hopefully, thanks to the persistence of their pursuers, the grassroots action and new cultural alternatives will eventually find a more secure position in our society, and so too will the spaces that allow their existence. The dynamic of the current era is very turbulent and the future is hard to predict, nevertheless, I believe that the struggle for a better urban society must and will continue!

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